IOM Morocco and its partners held a final conference for the project “Mobilization of Moroccans residing in Belgium for the development of Morocco” (MEDMA2) in Rabat last week. IOM’s Director General, William Lacy Swing attended, along with representatives of implementing partners.

Financed by the Belgian Cooperation, MEDMA2 is a pilot project implemented by IOM to explore how, through its investments, the Moroccan diaspora can play a positive role in the development of their country of origin. During the three year implementation of the project, the different partners of MEDMA2 have accompanied and guided select individuals who wished to invest in various areas such as health, services, tourism and logistics. The project has focused on three regions of Morocco: Tangier/Tetouan, Taza/Al Hoceima/Taounate and the Oriental, where the majority of Moroccans residing in Belgium are from.

In his opening remarks, Director General Swing noted the importance of creating appropriate mechanisms to enable members of the diaspora to contribute to the development of their country of origin, and to share their resources and expertise. He emphasized that "their contributions are not only financial but they also include their knowledge and skills, their experiences, their networks and their relations."

Furthermore, the Director General complimented the continuous efforts of the Moroccan government to recognize the role of its nationals abroad, in particular, their skills and resources. Moroccans residing outside of the country display "high strategic potential" for the development of Morocco, especially through their remitting power, as they contribute up to 7 per cent to the Moroccan GDP.

This project, aimed at the mobilization of Moroccan skills and expertise found in Belgium, is a "first experience" that should serve as a model in other countries, indicated the Minister in Charge of Moroccans Residing Abroad and Migration Affairs.

The conference brought together over 60 participants representing national institutions, Moroccan civil society, the United Nations and diplomatic corps accredited in Morocco, researchers, representatives of the targeted regions of the project, as well as the eleven selected individuals.

An external evaluation of the project carried out by the Universities of Antwerp and Oujda, and the resulting recommendations were presented to the public. Moreover, the conference allowed participants to discuss in general terms the subject of investments and finally to highlight the key role of the Moroccan diaspora in the development of the country.

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IOM’s quarterly communication with expatriate groups from MENA
TUNISIAN AMERICAN PROFESSIONALS HELP SHAPE NEW TUNISIA

The Tunisian American Young Professionals (TAYP) is a non-profit, non-political, professional organization that represents over 1,000 Tunisian American professionals in the United States. TAYP’s creation was inspired by the January 2011 events, led by the youth of Tunisia, to transition the country into a real democratic state. TAYP was born with the belief that economic prosperity is a key ingredient to ensure the successful transition to a new Tunisia.

TAYP aims at increasing the effectiveness of economic and investment flows between the US and Tunisia, and creating a networking platform for Tunisians who live (or lived) in the United States to help each other professionally.

Through its role as facilitator and advisor between pools of funding, Tunisian entrepreneurs, and US investors, TAYP has and continues to:

- Encourage US investors to consider Tunisia through presentations and roundtables at chambers of commerce, think tanks, and professional associations
- Condition the environment for increased US interest in Tunisia, with US agencies, Congress, and the Executive Branch
- Raise the awareness of Tunisia’s entrepreneurs regarding partnerships with US investors and agencies
- Support young entrepreneurs in developing their businesses through mentoring, technical and financial support

Through its 4 “E” model (Education, Entrepreneurship, Exchange, Export), TAYP promotes the US economic value proposition in Tunisia and leveraging its natural differentiators.

Among the many projects that TAYP initiated is the Handicraft Export Program, originally sponsored by US Embassy in Tunis, has been well received by U.S. consumers and generated significant additional revenues for artisans, with back order volumes of over $500,000. Additionally, this program has maintained 300 jobs and over 50 direct jobs were created, and generated a significant economic impact in 17 regions in Tunisia.

TAYP is currently establishing a Handicraft Collection Center in Tunis to collect, package, and label products for export. Handicraft products will be sent to a fulfillment center in Memphis, Tennessee, which will manage large and small orders and ship the handicrafts more cost-efficiently. In addition, the artisans will continue to participate in handicraft fairs in Tunisia and the United States to give them the opportunity to present products, develop economic ties, and strengthen their business acumen.

As TAYP continues to focus on its 4 E’s initiative, it will delve deeper into the current Tunisian export apparatus and create a cost-effective, long-term tool to solidify the future of the Tunisian handicraft sector.

TAYP efforts and projects were recognized by several organizations. The Handicraft Export project was highlighted at the Clinton Global Initiative’s Middle East and Africa meeting in Morocco and the World Fair Trade Organization Annual Conference in Milan Italy May, 2015.

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Moroccan-Belgian Zouhair Essikal is a former semi-professional football player. He is currently pursuing an MBA at the University of Warwick, and is an IT manager for the European Commission.

What is your link to the Moroccan expatriate community?

My family are from Asilah, a small village in the north west of Morocco. My father, who is car mechanic, arrived in Belgium with his boss to buy a car in 1974 and decided to stay here. He married my mother in 1977, and she joined him in Brussels. Except for two cousins, all my family is still in Morocco. Since I was young, I have returned every year to spend two months in Asilah. This was important as it allowed me to stay connected to my Moroccan roots and understand the Moroccan culture.

What was your trajectory for success?

I started to play football when I was 8 years old. First I played only in my neighbourhood. My father decided to put me in an official team. I later played for a team called "Etoile Marocaine" which was a regional football team created by the Moroccan community. I played there two years before being signed to a first division football team when I was seventeen.

What impact has football had on your connection to Europe? To Morocco?

Football helped me to find my place in the Belgian community. When I started to play, the team was a place where different cultures were mixed; there were Belgian players as well as Congolese, Turks and Italians. The football pitch was often a place where you could find people from the different waves of immigration that Belgium has experienced. It taught me from a very young age that we are living in a multi-cultural community and that you do not stick to one culture—you can be Belgian and Moroccan.

How do you engage with the Arab region/Morocco? Do you have any plans for future engagement?

When I was around 30, I signed back with "Etoile Marocain" where I had a special role in this team. I was captain but also a mentor for the young, mostly Moroccan players. I tried to help them to understand their place in the community, how they should behave, to avoid the temptations of the criminality and so on. Those young people have plenty of potential, but unfortunately lack of guidance and often fall into the trap of poverty.

After completing my MBA next year, I look for opportunities in the Middle Eastern markets. Indeed, by being fluent in two cultures, I can bring added value to international companies which are working on European and Arabic markets. My understanding of both worlds will definitely help me in such challenges.

How do you see the Moroccan expatriate community contributing to Morocco's development?

Morocco has long understood that the second generation of expatriate Moroccans is a valuable asset for the country. They launched different campaigns to bring back those qualified people in order to boost Moroccan companies. I think that this is really a brilliant idea. Morocco needs them and they often want to come back and bring an added value to their homeland.