



SUMMARY REPORT

MENA Regional Parliamentary Exchange: Strengthening Economic Development and Women's Political Empowerment

*February 22 - March 2, 2014
Washington, D.C and Richmond, VA*

From February 22 to March 2, 2014, the Institute for Representative Government (IRG), in cooperation with the National Democratic Institute (NDI), organized a parliamentary exchange for 17 Members of Parliament from four Middle East and North African countries: Jordan, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia¹. Women made up a majority of the delegation, and women's political participation was an important theme throughout the program. Another overarching theme was how legislatures can support inclusive economic development.

While in Washington, the MPs met with a bipartisan group of members of Congress, including the current chairs of the [House Democracy Partnership](#), senior congressional staff, representatives from Congressional support agencies, members of the National Security Council staff, and State Department representatives to discuss issues in the region and in the bilateral relationships of the U.S. and their respective countries. In Virginia, the delegation met with Governor Terry McAuliffe, the Virginia Secretary of Commerce and Trade Maurice Jones, and a bipartisan group of leaders from both chambers of the state legislature. The visit allowed an up-close look at "democracy in action," as the Virginia legislature worked to close out its current session. Finally, the delegation enjoyed a brief visit to colonial Williamsburg to discuss civic education and how to preserve democratic history and build national identity that includes democratic ideals.

The delegation was accompanied by NDI staff, including a staff member of the NDI Tunisia office, and three professional interpreters from the State Department's Office of Language Services. The program was made possible with funding by both the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). A narrative summary of the delegation's meetings and activities follows.

¹ Please see the attached participants list for attending Members and their political backgrounds.

OVERVIEW OF PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

The U.S. Legislative Process and Broader Political System

The members of the delegation began the formal program with a welcome session by **President of the National Democratic Institute Kenneth Wollack** and **Senior Associate and Director for MENA programs Les Campbell**. Mr. Wollack and Mr. Campbell provided an overview of NDI programs in the MENA region, as well as NDI's general programs, and provided an overview of the delegation's schedule of meetings. Mr. Wollack also discussed the current U.S. political climate, including recent increases in party polarization and topics like redistricting, campaign finance, and primary elections. Delegates discussed the recent political context in their home countries and priorities for the exchange.

The welcome session was followed by an overview of Congress by **Dr. Valerie Heitshusen, an analyst on the legislative process at the Congressional Research Service (CRS); Kevin Kayes, former Senate Parliamentarian**, and Kathy Gest, director of public affairs at NDI. Mr. Kayes and Dr. Heitshusen outlined the broad structure and relationships between the legislative branch and the executive branch. Much of the discussion centered on differences between the two chambers: the House as majoritarian and sprawling and the Senate more about deliberation and the individual rights of Senators. Members of the delegation inquired about powers for the minority party in the legislature, to which the Dr. Heitshusen replied, "In practice, the minority mainly tells voters what it would do differently." The delegation also asked about impeachment processes, which provided a segue into a discussion about checks and balances and Congressional oversight. Finally, the group discussed historic attempts to create third parties in the U.S. system and prospects for third parties to emerge again.



Two afternoon sessions further explored features of the U.S. Congress in depth: first, a session on Congressional committees and their role in policymaking and oversight by **Chris Davis, a former House and Senate staffer and current analyst from CRS** who specializes in parliamentary procedure; and second, a joint meeting with representatives from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and the Congressional Budget Office (CBO). Mr. Davis described how committees contribute to policy-making, including efforts by professional committee staff members, and how parties assign leadership roles within committees, a key determinant to a proposed policy's success. **Loren Yager, director of International Affairs and Trade at the GAO** and **Theresa Gullo, deputy assistant director of the Budget Analysis Division of the CBO** explained the nonpartisan oversight and support roles that their agencies play in helping Congress to evaluate policy and the federal budget. Both representatives underscored the

importance of nonpartisan, objective, independent, and transparent research in maintaining their agencies' long term credibility and relations with Congress.

Later in the week, the delegates had the opportunity to discuss with sitting Members of Congress and their staff the “nuts and bolts” of the policymaking process, and key concerns of Congressmen and Congresswomen. The delegation met with the current co-chairs of the House Democracy Partnership (HDP), **Rep. Peter Roskam (R-IL)** and **Rep. David Price (D-NC)**, where they considered the role and activities of HDP, a bipartisan commission that works with 16 countries to support the development of effective, independent, and responsive legislative institutions. Discussions also centered on Rep. Roskam’s role as Chief Deputy Whip and Rep. Price’s experience in the Congressional budget process as the ranking Democratic member of the Subcommittee on Homeland Security of the Appropriations Committee. In particular, the Tunisian participants expressed keen interest in joining the HDP. Later, **Rep. Dina Titus (D-NV)** spoke about the role of the Congressional Caucus on Women’s Issues and the role of women in the legislature more broadly, drawing on her experience with the House Democracy Partnership and as a trainer for women parliamentarians in Eastern Europe. One member of the delegation asked Rep. Titus to what extent party affiliation pervades political debates on women’s issues. Rep. Titus responded that while members of the caucus tend to align with their party on many issues, there are unifying causes that result in bipartisan action.



In a theme that would continue throughout the program, the visiting MPs had many questions for how a Congressional office functions, including staffing structures, resources, and communications. Finally, the delegation explored Congress’s role in current foreign policy in the MENA region with **Rep. Ted Deutch (D-FL)**, ranking Democratic member of the Subcommittee on Middle East and North Africa, of the Committee on Foreign Affairs. Before departing Capitol Hill, the group joined

Carol Dixon, a professional staffer from the Ethics Committee to discuss the importance of parliamentary ethics, how to develop ethics rules, and how to enforce them.

While on Capitol Hill, the delegation enjoyed a professionally guided tour of the Capitol and made a gallery visit to see votes and floor debate. They were also treated to a brief tour of a Congressman’s office by **Rep. Gerry Connolly’s staff** members.



Leadership and Political Culture

With a delegation that spanned a wide degree of political experience and backgrounds, from first time national parliamentarians to veteran lawmakers, NDI arranged for several sessions on political leadership. In addition to the meetings with active U.S. Congressmen, the delegation met with a host of current and former political leaders, including **former Senate Majority and Minority leader Tom Daschle**, three former Members of Congress and current IRG members, current **Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe**, and the Democratic and Republican leaders of the Virginia Senate.



Following the introductory sessions at NDI on the first day of the program, members of the delegation joined former **Senator Blanche Lincoln**, former **Representatives Nancy Johnson and John S. Tanner**, and **IRG Executive Director Peter M. Weichlein** for a working lunch to discuss the challenges the MPs face in their home countries, including on the themes of inclusive economic development and increasing women's political participation. The informal lunch setting allowed the former legislators to share personal stories from their political careers, which added further context for the delegation on how the formal components of the U.S. system works in practice, and how it confronts similar issues.

Later, Senator Daschle returned to the welcome session themes of checks and balances on U.S. policy-making, including the *de facto* and *de jure* powers that the U.S. Congress wields over the executive branch. He emphasized the importance of tolerance, engagement, leadership, and the rule of law in ensuring the longevity of democratic systems, which naturally led to a conversation about the importance of working with colleagues from different parties and backgrounds to achieve policy goals. One program participant, in their written evaluation, noted that Senator Daschle gave excellent advice on how to interact with the public and the importance of transparency.

These themes were echoed in a later meeting with recently inaugurated Governor Terry McAuliffe at the Governor's offices in Richmond, Virginia, who talked about the role of the governor in a federalist system and relations between the Virginia legislature and the Governor's executive agencies. Finally, the delegates enjoyed a bipartisan meeting with **Senators Richard Saslaw and Walter Stosch, the Democratic and Republican leaders of the Virginia Senate**. Senator Saslaw and Senator Stosch drew on their extensive leadership in the Senate leading both parties in power and in the opposition to describe how, with only a part-time legislature, the Virginia Senate is able to pass a budget and many other laws in two productive 30-day sessions.



Pressing Issues in the Region

The delegation capped the first day of their formal program with a meeting at the White House Conference Center led by **National Security Council (NSC) staff member Corinne Graff, director of democracy and governance programs**, who was joined by the acting director for North Africa. The MPs raised critical issues in the bilateral relationships, with the topics of support for the fledgling Libyan government against potentially destabilizing militias and support and aid for the growing Syrian refugee population in Jordan. While the delegation was frustrated to some extent by the “on-the-record” answers of the NSC conversations, NDI arranged for an informal off-the-record discussion over dinner with **Stephen McNerney, executive director of the Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED)**. Following an introduction by NDI's Les Campbell, Mr. McNerney explained some of the rationale behind the U.S. administration's policies in the Middle East and North Africa, and the types of engagement POMED encourages in an area of critical strategic importance and widespread transition.

Deputy Assistant Secretary Richard Schmierer of the State Department's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs during a briefing at the State Department, where he was joined by representatives from the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, and the U.S.-Middle East Partnership Initiative. Topics of interest again included the U.S. response to events in Syria and the Israel-Palestine conflict, the National Security Agency surveillance scandal, and recent comments by State Department spokesmen on the political situation in Libya and the nature of U.S. support.

Constituent Relations and Outreach

Participants of the exchange held a widespread interest in how U.S. legislators' staffing and other resources are allotted and structured, including as to how these resources support engagement with citizens. This was a common theme in dialogues with current and former legislators with whom the group met, but two meetings in particular - with Governor McAuliffe's communications staff and with the staff members of U.S. Senators Tim Kaine (D-VA) and Mark Warner's (D-VA) state offices - allowed a more in depth discussion. In the first, members of the delegation discussed communications to prospective voters on the campaign trail with **Brennan Bilberry, the communications director of Governor McAuliffe's 2013 gubernatorial campaign**, and developing communication strategies for new office holders with **Jamie Radice, the current communications director for Governor McAuliffe**. One MP asked how to combat false rumors about a candidacy, and other negative information in the media. Ms. Radice advised that for false information, it is usually best to respond quickly and directly, denying any misinformation and then pivoting to how a candidate or legislator would represent the voter's interests.

For more in-depth discussions of how U.S. legislators utilize their offices to ensure service delivery, the delegation met with **Senator Tim Kaine's State Director John Knapp, Casework and Constituent Services Director Marc Cheatham, and Senator Mark Warner's Outreach and Projects Director Drew Densmore**. The representatives discussed basic management best practices for supporting the Senators' offices around the state, and typical accounting and organizational details of a U.S. Senator's office environment. Mr. Knapp described how each Senator is allotted similar resources, but relatively broad discretion on how to use them, and how his office uses the "Kaine Connects" program to visit and gather feedback from communities that lack an on-the-ground presence. Mr. Densmore discussed how federal infrastructure projects are overseen and managed at the state level, and how the two Senators' staffs communicate with each other and other stakeholders across Virginia.

NDI followed up to further inquiries from the delegation by distributing the latest CRS report on Congressional Salaries and Allowances.

Women's Political Participation

Empowering women in politics was a key theme of the program. More than half the delegation was comprised of women legislators, and even in meetings not specifically related to women, the themes of gender mainstreaming and women's political participation extended throughout most discussion.



In keeping with the idea of an exchange of ideas, and to bring prominence to the theme of women's participation, NDI partnered with the Brookings Institution's Saban Center on Middle East Policy to organized a public event entitled "Women and the New Arab Politics." Each country's delegation elected one representative to join a panel discussion moderated by **Tamara Cofman Wittes, director of the Saban Center**, and the entire delegation participated in a pre-event briefing with Ms. Wittes and **NDI Director of Women's Political Participation programs**

Susan Markham. Despite morning snow flurries, the event attracted a standing-room only audience of approximately 125 listeners. In a wide-ranging conversation, the panelists discussed constitutional reforms to enhance women's participation in Jordan, advances in legal equality for men and women in Tunisia, parliamentary quotas and civil society advocacy on women's issues in Morocco, and principles of equality in Libya's interim constitution and the importance of both "horizontal" and "vertical" electoral lists for women candidates. As Ms. Wittes noted, defining or marking progression in women's empowerment across a range of contexts can be difficult, but the importance of women taking on positions of leadership in the political arena is essential to the advancement of gender equality.

In addition to spotlighting the importance of women's issues at the public event, the delegation enjoyed several off-the-record conversations with women leaders. One took place at Georgetown University's Institute for Women, Peace and Security, with **Executive Director and former Ambassador for Global Women's Issues Melanne Verveer.** Ambassador Verveer discussed avenues for getting women involved in positions of leadership at an early stage in their careers, and the importance of strong women voices on broader political development. She also drew on her experience as the Chair and Co-CEO of Vital Voices, an NGO that supports women leaders, to illuminate how women's political participation interacts with and supports the other program theme of economic development.

The delegates ended their formal meetings in Richmond, Virginia, with a frank discussion with two leading women leaders of the **Virginia House of Delegates: Betsy Carr and Vivian Watts.** Ms. Watts discussed her early political career and tenure as Virginia Secretary of Transportation and Public Safety, leading a number of agencies that were traditionally male-dominated. Both Ms. Carr and Ms. Watts discussed ways that women



delegates in Virginia informally work together “behind-the-scenes” to advance issues of common concern, including on education and public health. Delegates Carr and Watts also discussed their staffing arrangements and public resources, which are more comparable to the resources available to some of the visiting parliamentarians.

Legislative Support for Economic Development

Legislatures provide critical support for inclusive economic development. As many countries in the MENA region look to deliver economic growth to citizens, particularly with respect to the “youth bulge” across the region, legislators have an important role in supporting inclusive growth wherever possible. Members of the delegation explored how legislatures, civil society organizations, and the private sector can work together at a roundtable lunch with **Scott Eckart, director of congressional affairs for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce; Andrew Wilson, deputy director for the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE); and Hal Ferguson, deputy director for the Middle East and North Africa Division of the International Republican Institute (IRI)**. The delegation discussed how the important legislative work in rule of law, trade, and regulatory reform can lay a strong foundation for broad-based economic growth.



In Virginia, the delegation had another chance to learn about economic development from the perspective of **Maurice Jones, the Virginia Secretary of Commerce and Trade, and Paul H. Grossman, who serves as vice-president of the Virginia Economic Development Partnership**, an initiative of the Virginia Department of Commerce and Trade. In one of the highest rated sessions of the entire exchange, Secretary Jones discussed how executive agencies work with the legislature to create a strong environment for investment and jobs growth. Mr. Grossman prepared data on the top ten exports from Virginia

to each of the countries represented in the delegation, which fueled an interesting discussion on areas of potential increased trade in the future. One of the Members of Parliament asked how legislators can respond to citizens who see the government as a jobs provider, rather than as a facilitator of employment growth in the broader economy. Secretary Jones remarked that civil society organizations are critical to bridging citizen expectations of the legislature and the private sector. In this sense, a legislature’s support and empowerment of the nonprofit sector can help the citizenry and economy as a whole.

Civic Education and Cultural Activities

In keeping with the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs’ mission of cultural exchange, the delegation enjoyed a number of informative cultural activities on the margins of their core legislative strengthening meetings. On their first full day in Washington, the delegation enjoyed

a tour of the National Mall monuments and museums by an Arabic-speaking guide. The demonstrations in front of the White House by Venezuelan activists were a point of particular interest, and some members of the delegation initiated brief conversations about political activism in the United States. After the first full day of programming, each country's Embassy hosted a dinner and/or reception for their respective delegation. The visit to Virginia also offered opportunities for cultural highlights, including a brief visit to historic Williamsburg, where the delegation heard from the **CEO of Colonial Williamsburg and the Vice President of Research and Historical Interpretation** on how the historic foundation strengthens civic engagement and education through its many programs. The **Vice President of Colonial Williamsburg** published a reflection on the importance of these issues in a popular article for the Huffington Post, entitled "[We Don't Use that History Stuff, Do We?](#)"



Additionally, an impromptu lecture in Arabic from a young adult of Lebanese descent about the Virginia Senate page program delighted the participants, who then expressed interest in creating similar programs for youth engagement in their home legislatures.

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

NDI received very positive feedback in both informal conversations, during the farewell lunch and feedback session, and on formal written evaluations from the delegation. The Virginia portions of the trip scored very high overall, and the guided visit to Williamsburg was the highest overall rated portion of the visit. All of the MPs commented on how useful it was to travel with colleagues from different countries and different political backgrounds, and the importance of parliamentary exchanges to building trust on areas of shared concern. In a follow-up email, NDI shared the contact information of the members of the delegation, as well as information on the State Department's alumni network for exchange visitors in hopes of continued dialogues among the program participants.



Despite positive overall evaluations of the trips, some logistical issues, in part constrained by U.S. government regulations on allowable flights and meeting expenses, were not as highly rated as some other elements of the trip. NDI made strong efforts to accommodate MP requests, including making available halal food options at all meetings. Similarly, NDI altered flight itineraries based on feedback from the participants, whether it was to switch the departure airport to allay security concerns (as was the case in Libya) or to find different Fly America compliant routing than originally suggested (as was the preference of the Jordanian delegation).

Finally, amid high marks for nearly all of the meetings, the meeting with the National Security Council staff received unanimously low marks. In written evaluations, the MPs expressed frustration at not having an open and honest dialogue about pressing issues in the region. To ameliorate some of these frustrations, NDI focused a later working dinner on the specific foreign policy concerns in an off-the-record discussion with the executive director of the Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED). This was the highest rated session in the entire DC portion of the program, and the MPs informally expressed their appreciation for a second chance at more in depth discussions.



Note: For more details on participant feedback, see Appendix A: Participant Evaluations.