



Summary

Sensitive but Unclassified; please protect accordingly.

1. (SBU) Tunisia is at a crossroads on biotechnology policy. Tunisian policymakers are aware of the potential for biotechnology to address chronic problems such as crop disease, weeds, and irregularity of rainfall. A draft law currently under consideration would establish a legal framework for the importation, commercialization, and usage of biotechnology in agriculture. However, this effort may be compromised by skepticism on the use of biotechnology, a reflection of Tunisia's close ties with Europe. Embassy Tunis's proposed outreach project would target decision-makers and opinion leaders in the administration, legislature, and civil society to help assure the passage of viable biotechnology legislation; counter EU policies by explaining the benefits of biotechnology; and encourage the adoption in Tunisia of a science-based regulatory approach to biotechnology. End summary.

Project Proposal: Tunisia Workshop on Ag-Biotech

2. (U) Per reftel questions, Embassy Tunis's biotechnology outreach project consists of the following:

-- Purpose and impact: A regional leader in science and technology, Tunisia holds great potential for the advancement of ag-biotech and science-based policies. There are currently a dozen major institutes conducting biotech research on new molecular biology technologies such as viral genome isolation, gene cloning, transformation methods and functional genomics. However, although Tunisia is a signatory to the Cartagena protocol, this activity is limited to the research level because current Tunisian law does not treat the use and release of products of agricultural biotechnology.

A draft law on the use, marketing, and import of biotech products is currently under review and could be adopted by the National Assembly before the end of 2010. As this review goes forward, Embassy Tunis proposes to hold a one-day international workshop to address key questions raised by the biotechnology legislation; to counter EU policies by explaining the benefits of biotechnology; and to encourage the adoption in Tunisia of a science-based regulatory approach to biotechnology. By weighing in on biotechnology while the draft law is under consideration, the project could have a direct positive impact on the future application of biotech agriculture in Tunisia.

-- Specific ag-biotech issues to be addressed: With growing population pressure and limited farm lands, Tunisia's food security



is increasingly threatened by irregularity of rainfall. The proposed workshop would address the advantages of agricultural biotechnology in arid and semi-arid regions, including positive effects on crops yields, biotechnology's impact on biodiversity and the environment, and direct socio-economic benefits to Tunisian farmers from the use of biotechnology in agriculture.

In order to address these issues, Embassy Tunis would host two to three U.S. experts to serve as keynote speakers and roundtable participants at the workshop. These experts would also conduct targeted outreach to key stakeholders through Embassy-organized visits to research centers, Ministry offices, and other venues. (Note: Embassy proposes to recruit the speakers through the Bureau of International Information Programs and will coordinate with the Office of Agricultural Affairs in making the final selection. End note.)

-- Target audiences: The workshop would target decision-makers and opinion leaders in the administration, legislature, and civil society. These include Government of Tunisia officials from the Ministries of Agriculture, Environment, and Public Health, as well as key stakeholders in the National Assembly. Other participants would include researchers and faculty members of universities and research institutions; leaders of associations and nongovernmental institutions dealing with agricultural issues; private agri-business firms; and farmers' cooperatives and associations. Embassy Tunis would work to obtain positive media coverage of the event to further project the positive benefits of biotech agriculture.

-- Length of program: The program would consist of a one-day workshop with two days of meetings, consultations, and other targeted outreach activities. The optimal time frame would be June 2010.

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-- Cost of the proposed program: \$25,000 for the following components:
\$15,000 for three speakers' airfare, per diem, and lodging;
\$5,000 rental of conference space;
\$5,000 supplies and representational costs.

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