News Release

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

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Tunisia ' s Prime Minister Promises Democracy and End to Discrimination

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Adrian Monck, Managing Director, Head of Communications: +41 (0)79 817 0315; adrian.monck@weforum.org

- Despite predominance of Islamic parties, Tunisia ' s new government promises freedom of religion
- North Africa ' s biggest problem is massive unemployment
- The theme of the 42nd World Economic Forum Annual Meeting is The Great Transformation: Shaping New Models. For more information, visit http://wef.ch/Davos

Davos-Klosters, Switzerland, 27 January 2012 – Speaking to participants at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2012, Tunisia ' s new prime minister, Hammadi Jebali, promised that the country ' s new constitution will guarantee freedom of the press, an independent judiciary and an end to discrimination. " There will be no discrimination as to religion, language or gender, " Jebali said. The prime minister belongs to Tunisia ' s Ennahda Movement, a moderate Islamic party headed by Rachid Al Ghannouchi.

A wide-ranging panel discussion on the future of North Africa was unanimous about the need for democracy in the region as well as an end to heavy-handed control by political elites. Jebali noted that many of the new governments following the Arab Spring are likely to have a substantial Islamic representation, but that does not mean that they are not democratic. Abdelilah Benkirane, Chief of Government of Morocco, agreed. " Whether these governments are Islamic or not, who cares? " He added: " What is important is that they are democratic. " Amre Moussa, Presidential Candidate, Egypt; Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, Cairo (2001-2011), noted: " We have all embraced democracy. The question is whether the West will be able to deal with a democracy that is Arab. " Moussa elaborated: " The West wants democratic elections, but it wants elections in which the parties that they favour win. "

The panellists agreed that the region ' s new governments will need to produce tangible results quickly. Jebali emphasized that unemployment is the biggest issue. " We have 800,000 people who are unemployed – 200,000 have university degrees, and Tunisia is graduating 75,000 university students each year with no jobs waiting for them, " he said. Jebali added that 400,000 young people are living on less than one euro a day. Despite the economic challenge, he said he still believes that democracy can triumph.

Asked about the role of women, Jebali responded: " We cannot have an amputated democracy. We need to take into account the entire population. We cannot ignore women. " He added that Tunisia currently has a large number of women in its parliament, and that many of them belong to Ennahda.

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Notes to Editors

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WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM
World Economic Forum, 91-93 route de la Capite, CH-1223 Cologny/Geneva
Tel. +41 (0)22 869 1212, Fax +41 (0)22 786 2744, http://www.weforum.org