

Tunisia's Prime Minister Promises Democracy and End to Discrimination

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- 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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