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THE WHITE HOUSE

EXCHANGE OF TOASTS  
BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT  
AND  
HEDI NOUIRA  
PRIME MINISTER OF TUNISIA

STATE DINING ROOM

9:15 P.M. EDT

Mr. Prime Minister, first let me welcome you and your party to the White House this evening.

And may I express the warmth of the American people for you, and the people that you represent, and particularly President Bourguiba.

I thought the meeting we had this morning discussing some of the very important matters involving the Mediterranean and the Middle East were very helpful. We look forward to working with you, and others, in trying to make progress in that vital area of the world.

I could not help, as I looked at some of the material that came to me concerning your visit, to note the long, long relationship that your country and our country have had, going back to the latter part of the 18th century. We are proud of that longstanding, as well as currently warm relationship.

We trust that as we move into the days ahead there can be a broadening expansion and deepening of that relationship.

As we look at the progress in your country, which includes great educational advancements for your people, social progress for the people of Tunisia, an increase in the per capita income of the people of Tunisia, you should be very proud of the progress that has been achieved. But I know that the efforts of your President, of you and others, are aimed toward greater progress in the days ahead.

We compliment you and congratulate you on what has been done, and let me assure you we will try to work with you in the mutual efforts that can be helpful to ourselves as well as to others.

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I trust that the President can come here sometime in the future. We are very proud of our relationship with him and very anxious that he come and visit us.

May I extend to you, Mr. Prime Minister, on behalf of the American people, the warmest welcome and the very best wishes.

And to you and your party, and particularly to your President, a toast at this time.

To the people of Tunisia and to you, Mr. Prime Minister, and to the President.

PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA: Mr. President, I am deeply touched by the very flattering remarks you have just addressed to me, remarks which beyond myself, I know, are directed to President Bourguiba, founder of new Tunisia and to the Tunisian people.

I thank you most kindly and I want to express how deep is my joy to be in this great, generous and hospitable land. The honor and the pleasure I feel today are shared equally by the members of my delegation. I should like to express our gratitude for your kind invitation, as well as for the very warm welcome extended to us.

The century-long relations between our two countries, interrupted by the colonial interlude, have known, since Tunisia became independent, a new impulse in the very harmonious development.

My visit, Mr. President, is not only to be viewed within the framework of the very strong and traditional friendship which is the mark of our relationship, but it reflects also the very high degree of respect and mutual esteem between our two governments and our two peoples.

It is that our two countries have had in common from the very beginning a deep attachment to the ideals of peace, liberty and justice. And so it was that from the very first years of independence of Tunisia we found together, in a disinterested and fruitful cooperation, a very fertile ground to go together towards the concrete achievement of our special vision of man and society.

Tunisia, along these lines, is pledged to build its future, relying first and foremost upon her own resources, fully aware of the fact that development is first and foremost a national matter.

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Tunisians are investing considerable efforts to bring their own country out of its stage of undevelopment and to catch up the lag between our country and industrialized nations.

The proportion of our national product, which is devoted to development, the level of saving in the country, cutting down national consumption, all those have reached very high degrees. Under the impetus of President Bourguiba, Tunisia is at work. Stability, union and progress have never been as evident as they are today, nor have they been as reassuring as they are today.

Haven of peace and land of action, Tunisia, over the span of very few years, carried out substantial progress in a number of different areas. We feel that economic and social problems cannot be separated from national security considerations. The solution to be found to these problems is there for the first line of defense. That is why employment, over all development and speed up of development, and improving the standard of living are our priority objectives.

In the fulfillment of this enthusiastic task which aims at giving man the potential to fulfill his own self fully, Tunisia, while it calls on its own resources, requests the aid of its friendly nations.

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I must stress here that the United States has been of those who were first to respond to our appeal. The assistance that the great American people has given us has been a substantial aid.

It has adapted and it has evolved constantly to fit very closely with the various stages of our development, to the national character of Tunisia, and to the psychological and human environment of our country.

Faithful to an ideal and to a long tradition of support and assistance, yesterday, vis-a-vis Europe, and today for the countries of the Third World, the successive Administrations and Congresses of the United States, who have led your great Nation, have always advocated and implemented a consistent policy of very close cooperation with Tunisia.

There remains much to be done to fully attain the objectives of creation of wealth and dissemination of well being that Tunisia has set for itself. The contribution of our friends remains indispensable to the extent that they are the necessary complement to our own efforts and to the extent that through technology and science transfer they contribute to giving our development a new dimension and a determinant impulse.

Mr. President, whether we talk about our own problems or international matters, to which the Tunisian people pay particular attention, our political action has always been clear and consistent.

Our calling is that of an Arab nation, of a Mediterranean nation, of an African nation. It is based upon the principles of law, justice and freedom. Those are the very principles which guided us yesterday in our struggle for liberation, which guide us today in will to develop our country.

The world in which we live will not lead you to all-out optimism. If detente appears to place itself within a historical context as a growing reality, and if contacts among the great powers concerning disarmament are pursued, still many problems await to be solved.

In our part of the world, and more particularly in the Eastern part of the Israeli area, peace remains precarious.

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We have followed with sustained attention the very laudable efforts of Dr. Kissinger. Even though they have not succeeded to attaining a tangible and immediate result, we believe that the mission of the Secretary of State has the great merit of bringing forth very clearly the responsibilities of each party.

International opinion knows clearly that if it was not possible to bring about the initiation of the peace process, the fault lies primarily upon the intransigence of the Israeli leaders.

We must observe that today most international organization, most nations, have finally recognized the legitimacy of the struggle by the Palestinian people, a people who derives its strength from its right to live in a sovereign manner upon the lands of its ancestors in freedom and dignity.

It is an illusion to attempt to build a just and durable peace in the Middle East without the participation of the representatives of the Palestinian people. That is why we have always advocated a return to international legality.

The organization of the United Nations, at the same time in 1947, was drawing up the document giving birth to the State of Israel, was also simultaneously defining its boundaries.

Upon our African continent, colonialism has not entirely laid down its arms. Millions of African nationals continue to suffer the injustices of discrimination and oppression. There also we hope that reason will prevail and we feel that the international community must strive to spare these innocents the unfortunate events which usually accompany violent reactions.

We must also observe sadly that the suffering of the civilian populations of the Southeast Asian area do not appear to have reached their final point. We hope that the voice of reason and of the heart will prevail over any other consideration and that very soon a tragedy which has cost much and lasted long will come to an end.

Tunisia has consistently felt and stated that it is detrimental to resolve problems in an atmosphere of resentment and violence. We remain convinced that throughout the world, dialogue must prevail over the recourse to blind force and the judgment of arms.

Those are the lines along which we feel that the solution of the major issue preoccupying today the governments must be found, and I refer, of course, to the economic crisis which has broken out worldwide and which gives more precarious character to international balance which already, by its very nature, is an unstable balance.

We feel it is urgent to re-examine the rules and principles which have, up to now, ruled international relationships in the economic and financial fields. In this connection, Tunisia feels the new economic order is a vital need in order to raise the standard of living of hundreds of millions of men and women, and in order to exorcise the scourges of poverty, hunger, disease and ignorance which weighs so heavily upon nearly half of mankind.

Tunisia is convinced, not only for ethical and ideological reasons, but because it feels deeply this is the essential manner, the essential token for international security and that this is indispensable for the development and the harmonious fulfillment of the individual human being.

Tunisia is also convinced that mankind, as a whole, must and can make progress toward setting up this new economic order in a serene and considered manner, not in a fruitless confrontation.

Developed nations, particularly the United States, are facing historic responsibility to contribute to the setting up of this economic order which should be worldwide and more equitable because it is very true that the economies of the rich nations and of the poor nations are interdependent and complementary. This has been demonstrated clearly.

There is wide opportunity for fruitful and promising cooperation in the interest of all and consultation and dialogue should replace the passionate behavior or the sectarian attitudes and intransigent selfishness.

The world is evolving in such a manner that a reconsideration of the relationship between industrialized nations and developing nations is a must.

The laws of market alone may not rule these relationships because if there is a certain legitimacy there, still it is not the sole justification and it is not admitted with other restrictions by the Third World nations.

The main international bodies which arose out of World War II claimed probably -- this was the generous intent of their founders -- claimed to take into account the interests of their members. But experience has proved that if they did indeed contribute substantially to those who were less well endowed, they were still not in a position to foresee the pace of evolution of our societies and they were in a certain sense, called upon to manage the interests of the stronger among nations.

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This has produced an acceleration of tensions in every area--even in every part of the world--which has been detrimental to some, and which has been a catastrophe to a large number.

Because of its size and prestige, the genius of its people, and the wisdom of its leaders, the United States must play a decisive role in order to bring about a period of peace and prosperity throughout the world.

When he came to Tunisia, Secretary Tabor compared the world situation to a vessel which carries a large number of passengers, but which also carries a very big and bulky elephant. Now, this is a very dramatic picture and I believe the passengers on this vessel want as much as the elephant to come together, to come to an understanding, so that they will not all together tumble overboard and find themselves at the bottom of the sea.

Mr. President, I am convinced that the meetings that we shall have with the high leaders of your Administration, as well as with some of the honorable Members of the Congress, will bring about very positive results and will strengthen the free and fruitful cooperation that has existed between our two countries within the framework of our common pragmatic approach, and the spirit of support and solidarity which has always motivated the Government and the people of the United States with respect to Tunisia.

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When we think of the celebration next year of the Bicentennial of the United States, Mr. President, I cannot keep myself from thinking back upon the faith of those proud founders, their vision, who two centuries ago united the American people to free their people and build here the greatest democracy the world has ever seen.

As directed by President Bourguiba, Tunisia will be happy to participate in this manifestation, and it will offer as a contribution to the celebration an exhibition of some of the most beautiful mosaics, which retrace life in Tunisia under the Roman empire.

Throughout the ages and over time, from the very first steps of the pilgrims who landed upon an unfriendly shore, all the way to the first steps of your astronauts over the moon, your history is a succession of stunning victories over nature, to wrest from nature its secrets and put them at the service of man.

This has been made possible through the genius, the perseverance and the courage of your research workers and your scientists.

I want to raise my glass, Mr. President, to peace and free cooperation among nations, and let us raise our glass to the prosperity of the American people and friendship between Tunisia and the United States.

END (AT 9:55 P.M. EDT)