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## His Majesty King Abdullah's key US visit



Their Majesties King Abdullah and Queen Rania returned home after concluding a several-day visit to the US during which HM King Abdullah delivered a historic address to a joint meeting of Congress, urging the US leadership to help the Palestinians and Israelis to achieve peace.

King Abdullah, who thanked the Congress for supporting Jordan's progress, appealed for American support for the Middle East peace process to create new possibilities for the region and the entire world. "We must work together to restore peace, hope and opportunity to the Palestinian people. And in doing so, we will begin a process of building peace, not only throughout the region, but throughout the world," the King told the US congressmen in his address. The Monarch said Arab efforts "can only be successful if they are matched by a similar diplomatic offensive" by international powers and the Quartet.

## Reactions to HM King Abdullah's historic address to US Congress



- Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdul Ilah Khatib, who accompanied the King on the visit, said the Monarch's address was an important step in the history of Arab politics.
- Egypt's Ambassador in Washington Nabil Fahmi said the King's description of the Palestinian question as being the core issue of the Middle East was accurate, strong and clear, as well as very useful on the American level.
- Bahrain's Ambassador in Washington Nasser Buloshi commended the King's speech.
- Representatives of Arab and Muslim organisations in the US, who met with the King welcomed his remarks.
- Arab American Institute President James Zogby praised the King's message to the US Congress, describing it as strong and brave.
- Council on American-Islamic Relations Director Nihad Awad said "American politicians are not used to hearing such a candid address and they listened to it with interest" from a friend and an ally who is regarded as "an important and pivotal leader."
- Jordanian political analyst Fares Breizat said the King's address was an emotional, human and moral message to the US community and decision makers.

Meanwhile, during the royal visit to the US, King Abdullah met with US President George W. Bush and stressed the importance of US commitment to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, amid the current momentum to revive the Middle East peace process. Also, during his meetings with US Vice President Dick Cheney and US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, the Monarch called on the US administration to advance the peace process by supporting the Arab Peace Initiative.

In an interview with Jim Lehrer from the Public Broadcasting Service, HM the King underlined the importance of arriving at a final settlement to the Palestinian question, stressing the role the US can play in this regard. The King attributed earlier progress in the peace process to direct US efforts. Without peace, a cycle of violence will affect the region for many years to come, the King told Lehrer.

During a meeting with chief executive officers of several major companies in the state of Massachusetts, HM King Abdullah reiterated Jordan's commitment to comprehensive development despite regional challenges. King Abdullah detailed the business opportunities available in the country to chief executive officers of several major companies in the state of Massachusetts. The Monarch said that the country's drive towards development includes the building of an open, free and dynamic economy. "Jordan seeks to maintain the overall economic stability and to build a conducive investment environment," the King added, stressing the drive to enhance effectiveness and accountability in the government's decision-making process. HM the King cited several steps that the government will carry out to enhance the development process. These include the issuance of a law on combating money laundering, so that the country will be in total compliance by the coming year with the Basel II agreement which aims to promote financial stability. King Abdullah highlighted the investment opportunities available in the country, including those under the privatisation scheme. Other opportunities include infrastructure projects including the Red-Dead Sea Canal, the gas distribution network in the cities of Amman and Zarqa, the railroad projects and Aqaba Transport Project, the King told the businessmen.

### Arab leaders call on Israel to accept land-for-peace offer



Arab leaders called on Israel to accept their land-for-peace offer and open direct negotiations with the Arabs, hoping to give a new push to the long-stalled Mideast peace process. The gathering of Arab leaders also expressed fears of a nuclear arms race in the Middle East as they ended a two-day Arab Summit in Riyadh that tried to tackle the numerous crises in the region, including the bloodshed in Iraq and the increasing power of Iran. The gathering showed public unity as it revived the peace offer, which it first made in 2002.

According to statements published after the end of summit, Arab leaders agreed to establish "working groups" that will seek to drum up support for the deal from the US, UN and Europe. Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan hope the smaller groups will be able to be more flexible in promoting the offer to win acceptance, despite the summit's rejection of changes.

### King urges unified Arab effort to face challenges and threats



In his speech to the gathering, HM King Abdullah called on the United States to push Israel to accept the offer, and said peace between Arab states and Israel cannot be reached unless Israel deals positively and seriously with the Arab initiative. "That is the real challenge for the leaders of the region and the world, especially the United States," the King said in his speech to the gathering. According to HM the King "Israel therefore must choose: Either live in a permanent cycle of war and increasing hatred, or accept the peace option and coexistence, which is long overdue, and restore the confidence of people in the region in peace". After returning home HM King Abdullah sent a letter to Saudi King Abdullah, saying the "success of the summit showed that Arabs were serious about achieving a just and comprehensive peace", the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

### Jordan signs UN treaty on disabilities

A total of 81 member states including Jordan and the European community on March 30, 2007 signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which seeks to improve the lives of the world's estimated 650 million people with disabilities, a record for the first day of signature of any convention according to a UN statement.

HRH Prince Raad, Chief Chamberlain, who signed for the Kingdom, said the convention is a historic event for all people with disabilities around the world, particularly Jordan. "The convention will help us develop local policies, review legislation and enrich related programmes in order to achieve more progress for the disabled in Jordan," Prince Raad told the Jordan News Agency, Petra, in New York. Prince Raad said signing the convention coincides with the endorsement of the 2007 law for people with disabilities in Jordan, where the number of disabled ranges between 180,000 and 200,000.

The convention outlaws discrimination against persons with disabilities in all areas of life, including employment, education, health services, transportation and access to justice. It requires that public spaces and buildings be accessible to persons with disabilities, and calls for improvements to information and communications infrastructure. It will also strengthen social, economic and political rights of people with disabilities and reinforce their quality of life by enhancing equality and mutual respect at the local community level, he added.

### HRH Prince Hassan's keynote speech at EPC: "Coexistence of Civilisations"



In a keynote speech at the European Policy Centre in Brussels on the "coexistence of civilizations" HRH Prince Hassan Bin Tallal began by explaining that the 'Co-existence of Civilisations' initiative was launched by the Danish newspaper *Mandag Morgen* in response to the 'cartoon crisis' in Denmark. It aims to build a dialogue to strengthen co-existence across nations, cultures, religions and values, and is taking this message on an "expedition" around the world. Nowhere, said the Prince, was there "more evidence of 'hard or military' security than its use in the global war on terror", which was being played out in his immediate neighbourhood. He regretted that although *Hamas* had won the democratic elections in the Palestinian Authority, the new government was being ostracised in a way that many people had described as applying "double standards". He called instead for a "soft security" approach based on an understanding of the vulnerability and the humiliation suffered by people in the area. Prince Hassan said he was working to create "public spaces for co-existence". The Prince said he had travelled through West Asia and the North African region (WANA) in his efforts to build the Middle East Citizens Assembly, spanning a Middle East reaching from Morocco to Calcutta and including all nationalities and all religions "without exception".

The prince asked Jews, Christians and Muslims to work together on a history of the Mediterranean. As the only Muslim member of the Centre for Hebrew Studies in Oxford, the Prince is working on a project on the undercurrents in the Jewish prayer book and said he hoped this could lead to a study on the standards shared by all religions. Prince Hassan also asked Europe to do more to spread the co-existence of civilisations. Prince Hassan suggested bringing together religious figures from all the faiths to form a "multidimensional peace corps" to help the world's sick and poor. Prince Hassan called for a Summit for Iraq to ensure an international commitment to peace, voicing concern about the growth of weapons purchasing in the region.

### Al-Ali reiterates commitment to reform agenda

Minister of Planning and International Cooperation Suhair Al-Ali on said as Jordan seeks to accelerate its political, social and economic national reform agenda, it continues to count on US support. During a meeting with a delegation from the US National Defence University (NDU), the minister expressed Jordanian appreciation for continued US assistance over the years, which she said has supported Jordan's development and reform efforts. She underlined some of the challenges facing the economy, including the rise in international oil prices, the current account deficit and high poverty and unemployment levels, in addition to the overall political climate in the region. The minister also briefed the delegation on the measures taken by the government, since 2005, to address and mitigate the impact of these challenges. Al-Ali reiterated Jordan's commitment to its reform agenda targeted at a better life for All Jordanians and embedded in the recently adopted "We are All Jordan" initiative, which was developed through the extensive participation of all segments of society.

For their part, the delegates highlighted the recognition that Jordan receives at various levels of the US administration and the pivotal role it plays on the political and economic spheres, regionally and globally.

### Her Majesty Queen Rania calls on companies to bridge East-West divide through Corporate Multicultural Responsibility



Recognizing the growing divide between East and West, Her Majesty Queen Rania urged business leaders to reinvigorate a trend of Corporate Multicultural Responsibility, during a speech she delivered at the Skoll World Forum in Oxford, United Kingdom. Drawing on the development of corporate social responsibility in recent history, Her Majesty called on corporations to take an active role in bridging the divide between East and West. "Our post-global society is poverty stricken—with a new kind of poverty," said the Queen, "Today, we live in a world plagued by a poverty of multicultural knowledge, a poverty of multicultural tolerance, a poverty of multicultural respect." "We have all come to recognize that social inequality is wrong; we must also appreciate that social intolerance is wrong. Both hold us back," said Queen Rania, "We all have a role to play in promoting multicultural responsibility in our homes, schools, neighbourhoods, universities, places of worship, and places of work."

Citing alarming statistics released by Gallop last year, Her Majesty said that 22 percent of Americans did not want a Muslim as a neighbour and one third said they would feel nervous if they noticed a Muslim man on their flight. "I am alarmed at the way in which the Muslim world and our Western counterparts are looking at each other with suspicion, fear, prejudice then turning away." Such a growing trend of isolation is dangerous because, as Queen Rania noted "we all belong in some sense to East and West... let us not forget that East and West are neighbours. And good neighbours do more than live alongside each other – they live together."

One remedy to tackle the rift between cultures is for corporations to increase cross-cultural awareness. "Companies must play a key role in bridging the East-West divide, in making us better neighbours... I call it Corporate Multicultural Responsibility," she said. "CMR means insisting that all staff get as much time learning about global diversity as time management and communication skills—ensuring a truly global employee population. CMR means that company strategies must reflect cultural challenges alongside market, distribution and pricing considerations. CMR means taking the time to break down cultural barriers... [it] means reaffirming the healing values of humanity within the company and encouraging employees to carry them to their homes and communities," said Queen Rania. Her Majesty warned that "[Global firms] need to understand other cultures, or they risk losing out in the scramble to tap enormous, lucrative new markets."

Her Majesty said that in the weeks and months ahead, she plans to **expand on these ideas "with the aim of championing a culture of trust and respect between Islam and the West."**

The Skoll World Forum on Social Entrepreneurship is an international event, which this year brought together international icons such as Muhammad Yunus, the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Grameen Bank founder and microfinance pioneer. At the event, Yunus spoke of the importance of "social businesses" where companies can create feasible economic models that do good for people. Among the more than 700 social entrepreneurs, thought leaders, policy makers, corporate representatives, financiers, philanthropists and students attending the forum, was Jeffery Skoll, founder and Chairman of the Skoll Foundation. The Skoll Foundation's mission is to advance systemic change to benefit communities around the world by investing in, connecting and celebrating social entrepreneurs. By identifying the people and programs already bringing positive changes to communities throughout the world, the Skoll Foundation empowers them to extend their reach, deepen their impact and fundamentally improve society

### Jordanian woman judge receives the Prominent Woman in International Law Award

Judge Taghrid Hikmat receives the Prominent Woman in International Law Award at a ceremony in Washington, DC. The Women in International Law Interest Group (WILIG) of the American Society of International Law (ASIL) is honouring Hikmat for her "many tremendous achievements," including her contributions as a judge in Jordan and at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. The award presented at a luncheon on March 30 as part of ASIL's 101st annual meeting, where Hikmat is the guest speaker.

Hikmat's career as a judge began with her appointment as assistant to the attorney general for judicial cases. She then became a judge at the Court of Appeals for the Income Tax Department before finally being appointed as a judge at the Criminal Court. Hikmat, who is also a recipient of the Distinguished Arab Woman Award and the Bahraini Medal of the Second Order, was among four Jordanian women who were nominated for the 2005 Nobel Peace Prize among 1,000 candidates worldwide. Hikmat made history when she was elected to the UN International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in 2003, becoming the first Jordanian woman and Arab judge to serve the prestigious court. The mother of three was the first woman ever appointed to the judiciary and to the Criminal Court in Jordan.

The ASIL's Women in International Law Interest Group is a global network of approximately 800 members, created to promote and enhance the careers of women in the field of international law. In 1993, WILIG introduced the Prominent Women in International Law Awards to recognise the work of outstanding women involved in various aspects of international law. Past recipients of this award have included Judge Rosalyn Higgins, president of the International Court of Justice, Cecilia Medina, Judge of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and Patricia Wald, former Judge of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

### Jordan's first Animal Welfare Centre officially opened...

The Humane Centre for Animal Welfare (HCAW), which offers medical treatment to animals and promotes a culture of compassion and kindness to animals, officially opened in Amman.

Built on a 2,000-square-metre area, the centre houses two surgical theatres, a pharmacy, recovery room, and an X-ray lab among other facilities. Employing three veterinarians, HCAW is the only veterinary hospital in the country that provides free medical services to animals and provides on-the-job training to veterinary undergraduates to help them acquire practical insight and add to their professional knowledge, Hamam added.

The centre, however, will accept "donations" from those who can afford to pay for the treatment of their pets. It is hoped that donations would help sustaining the free services provided to impoverished citizens and advance the educational programmes implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Education. Through its educational department, the centre has established 13 animal welfare clubs across the country in cooperation with the ministry. These clubs target students aged between 9-16 years and seek to encourage humane treatment of animals. They are supervised by schoolteachers who are trained at the centre through seminars and lectures that reinforce the relationship between humans and animals, in addition to basic instruction on methods for taking care of animals. Educational programmes are also organised at several public and private schools to promote compassionate treatment of animals and increase students' knowledge about the animal world and the environment.

In addition, HCAW is carrying out a campaign that seeks to promote animal welfare legislation relating to the control of stray animals, pet shop and zoo standards and regulations, in cooperation with the Greater Amman

### Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority



Aqaba was designated as a Special Economic Zone on February 15th, 2001 under the provisions of the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Law. In 2000, this law established the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA) as the legal heir of both the Aqaba Regional Authority and the Aqaba Municipality within ASEZA.

Aqaba, encompassing Jordan's entire coastline, is situated at the crossroads of four countries and three continents. It also boasts a deep-water seaport, an international airport, and a network of modern highways connecting it to the surrounding region.

Aqaba is envisaged to become the leading Red Sea destination for tourists, an enticing shopping center, a leading transportation and trading hub, as well as a leading regional development center for information and communication technology, among other things.

ASEZA is set to qualify the zone to attract investors and create a healthy investment environment to stimulate industry, trade, tourism and services. Its other responsibilities include simplifying procedures, promoting the private sector's role, and creating jobs for Jordanians.

ASEZ, which covers an area of approximately 375 square kilometers and extends to the land borders of Israel and Saudi Arabia and the territorial waters of Egypt, offers investors attractive business incentives; tax exemption and duty-free import.

These include, but are not limited to exemption from custom duties and sales tax/VAT on all imports to the ASEZ (except for cars). Investors are exempt from the social services tax, and annual land and building taxes on utilized property. Exemption from sales tax on the final consumption of all goods and services, except for a 7% services and retail tax. A 5% flat tax on net business income, except for banking, insurance, and land transport services, which are subject to prevailing Jordanian income tax.

Products manufactured in Jordan enjoy duty and quota free access to the U.S. through the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and the Qualifying Industrial Zones (QIZ) and the EU through the Euro-Jordanian Partnership Agreement.

ASEZ is bringing immense economic benefits to Jordan. Investments inflows are expected to amount to six billion U.S. dollars over the next twenty years, and the number of jobs created as a result will amount to more than seventy thousand. Moreover, the Jordanian government hopes Aqaba's success will have a spillover effect on the entire economic future of the country. For more information on ASEZ and ASEZA please check ([www.aqabazone.com](http://www.aqabazone.com)).

ASEZ is the product of Jordan's wide-scale aggressive policy to position the country within the global economy. The zone is also emerging as a major duty-free economic development node for tourism, recreational and professional services, multi-modal transportation, and value-added industries in the Middle East.



### Discover the delights of Jordan's Red Sea resort

With its wealth of other attractions, Jordan's splendid Red Sea resort is often overlooked by modern-day visitors. But apart from being a delightful place for discerning holidaymakers, this is actually a great base from which to explore various places of interest in southern Jordan.

Aqaba is a fun place. It is a microcosm of all the good things Jordan has to offer, including a fascinating history with some outstanding sites, excellent hotels and activities, superb visitor facilities, good shopping, and welcoming, friendly people, who enjoy nothing more than making sure their visitors have a good time.

But perhaps Aqaba's greatest asset is the Red Sea itself. Here you can experience some of the best snorkelling and diving in the world. The temperate climate and gentle water currents have created a perfect environment for the growth of corals and a teeming plethora of marine life. Here you can swim with friendly sea turtles and dolphins as they dart amongst the schools of multicoloured fish. Night dives reveal the nocturnal sea creatures, crabs, lobsters and shrimp, as they search for a midnight snack.

There are several dive centres in Aqaba. All offer well-maintained diving equipment, professional instructors, and transport by boat to a variety of dive sites.

For those who prefer to keep their feet dry, all the deep sea wonders can be viewed through a glass-bottomed boat or by submarine, or you can just relax under the sun on the resort's sandy beaches. Plus, of course, there are plenty of other water-sport activities available, as well as an extensive and interesting Marine Park.

Aqaba International Airport is situated just a 20-minute drive from the town centre and services regular flights from Amman as well as from several European cities. From the town centre, the borders of Israel, Egypt's Sinai and Saudi Arabia are no more than a 30-minute drive.

The Jordanian Embassy welcomes your views and feedback. Please contact Jordan News Bulletin editor Dr. Abdelrahman Abu-Laban at:

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