

COUNTRY PROFILE: TUNISIA

August 2008



BASIC FACTS

- Population of 10,383,577 (2008 est.), area of 164,150 sq km (63,378 sq miles)
- Life expectancy at birth – 74 years (men), 77 years (women)
- Total adult literacy rate – 74.3%.
- GDP per capita – US\$ 2,890 (Nominal - 2006 estimate)

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT:

Home of the ancient city of Carthage, Tunisia has long been an important player in the Mediterranean, placed as it is in the centre of North Africa, close to vital shipping routes. In their time, the Romans, Arabs, Ottoman Turks and French realised its strategic significance, making it a hub for control over the region.

Rivalry between French and Italian interests in Tunisia culminated in a French invasion in 1881 and the creation of a protectorate. Agitation for independence in the decades following World War I was finally successful in getting the French to recognize Tunisia as an independent state in 1956. The country's first president, Habib Bourguiba, ruled for 31 years, and established many rights for women. These included emancipation for women, the abolition of polygamy and compulsory free education.

In November 1987, Bourguiba was replaced by Zine el Abidine Ben Ali. He inherited an economically-stable country. Ben Ali is currently serving his fourth consecutive five-year term as president; the next elections are scheduled for October 2009

POLITICS:

Tunisia is a republic with a strong presidential system dominated by a single political party. President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali has been in office since 1987, the year he replaced Habib Bourguiba in a bloodless coup. The constitution has been changed twice to allow Ben Ali to remain in power, initially from two to three terms, then from three to five. The ruling party, the Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD), was the sole legal party for 25 years, known previously as the Socialist Destourian Party (PSD).



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

AT A GLANCE:

- Full name: Tunisian Republic
- Population: 10.4 million (UN, 2007)
- Capital: Tunis
- Area: 164,150 sq km (63,378 sq miles)
- Major languages: Arabic (official); French
- Major religion: Islam
- Life expectancy: 74 years (men), 77 years (women)
- Monetary unit: 1 Tunisian dinar (TD) = 1,000 millimes
- Main exports: Agricultural products, textiles, oil
- GDP per capita: US \$2,890 (World Bank, 2006)
- Internet domain: .tn
- International dialling code: +216

The President is elected to 5-year terms. He appoints a Prime Minister and cabinet, who play a strong role in the execution of policy. Regional governors and local administrators also are appointed by the central government. Mayors and municipal councils are elected. There is a unicameral legislative body, the Chamber of Deputies, which has 182 seats, 20% of which are reserved for opposition parties.

ECONOMY:

Tunisia has a diverse economy, with important agricultural, mining, tourism, and manufacturing sectors. Governmental control of economic affairs has gradually lessened over the past decade with increasing privatization, simplification of the tax structure, and a prudent approach to debt. Progressive social policies also have helped raise living conditions in Tunisia relative to the region. Real growth, which averaged almost 5% over the past decade, reached 6.3% in 2007 because of development in non-textile manufacturing, a recovery in agricultural production, and strong growth in the services sector.

Tunisia's association agreement with the European Union (EU), the first such accord between the EU and a Mediterranean country, entered into force on March 1, 1998. Under the agreement Tunisia will gradually remove barriers to trade with the EU over the next decade. Tunisia is ranked most competitive economy of Africa in the 2007 edition of the Global Competitiveness Report that is released by the World Economic Forum. It also ranks first in the Arab World and 29th globally.

Sources:

BBC News - http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/country_profiles/791969.stm

Wikipedia - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/tunisia>

UNDP - <http://www.tn.undp.org/>