

# Jordan and the United States: Building a Lasting Partnership

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This year marks the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the United States. The relationship between the two countries is both strategic and warm, and it has come a long way since the early 1950s.

At that time, much of what we accomplished, jointly, alas found expression only in the narrower confines of crisis management or when crises enveloped parts of the Middle East or, indeed, even Jordan itself. The arrival of the 1970s saw a transformation of this intermittent coordination, as we built a more stable foundation. And we, Jordanians, like to believe the United States began to realize then just how fundamental a successful Jordan was to the stability of the Middle East. The relationship also began to take on a much more personal flavor. His Late Majesty King Hussein was, after all, an extraordinary man; he was a leader who, by the 1970s, had developed strong personal friendships with many Americans—leaders and ordinary citizens alike.

By the time His Majesty King Abdullah II Ibn Al Hussein inherited the throne from his late father in 1999, Jordan enjoyed a strong relationship with the United States. But His Majesty, no less a remarkable leader than his father, has sought to deepen it, and to expand it further. Not only was Jordan one of the first countries to conclude a Free Trade Agreement with the United States, it also became a close ally in confronting extremism. While having a better intelligence capability or improved security measures has certainly been a large part of it, His Majesty also undertook measures on behalf of the Muslim world, to create an ideological front against extremism, and the Amman Message was subsequently launched.

This year, as Jordan and the United States celebrate this 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we also look forward to working closely with President Barack Obama and his Cabinet—in this their inaugural year—and with all our friends in Congress, in the hope of strengthening our strategic partnership through close dialogue and continued cooperation.

## US Leadership is Essential for Achieving Peace

Under its Hashemite leadership, Jordan has spared no effort in the search for peace in our volatile corner of the globe. After 61 years, the Middle East conflict very much remains the region's principal source of instability—often fueling violence in other parts of our region, fanning radicalization, and dashing hopes for a normal, dignified life for all Palestinians and Israelis.

Today, the status quo is no longer sustainable. In addressing a joint meeting before the US Congress in 2007, His Majesty King Abdullah warned of this by noting how the absence of peace was “pulling the region and the world towards greater danger. As public

confidence in the peace process has dropped, the cycle of crises is spinning faster, and with greater potential for destruction.”

The United States’ proactive engagement, indeed its leadership, remains crucial to resolving this conflict through a negotiated solution, one which “brings statehood and freedom for Palestinians and security and more regional acceptance for Israel.”

We, in Jordan, have welcomed President Obama’s dedication to achieving peace between Israelis and Palestinians and we hope to work together with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and special envoy George Mitchell in breathing life back into the Middle East peace efforts, while strengthening the voices of moderation in our region and renewing our people’s hope for a peaceful and more prosperous future.

#### Interfaith Coexistence, Embracing Diversity

President Barack Obama’s inauguration this January was a historic event for Americans and for all those watching in the Arab and Muslim worlds. The President’s message to the people of the region that America seeks a “new way forward” with Muslims based on “mutual respect” is not only welcomed but also supported fully by Jordan and its people. It is a message that resonates with Jordan’s tireless efforts in encouraging dialogue both within the Muslim world and between the Abrahamic faiths.

In 2005, Jordan launched the Amman Message in an effort to reveal the true values of Islam based on tolerance and humanity, rejecting extremism as a deviation from Islamic beliefs and calling for “peaceful coexistence among all human beings.” This initiative has been supported by more than 500 leading Muslim scholars representing all eight schools of Islamic jurisprudence across the globe and has been endorsed by the Organization of Islamic States, representing the world’s Muslim countries.

In addition, Jordan continues to support global interfaith initiatives such as “A Common Word” to which Reverend Sharon Watkins made reference during her sermon at the National Cathedral on January 21, 2009, noting that it “proposes a common basis for building a world at peace,” as it represents an historic overture from Muslim scholars to Christian leaders.

Jordan is proud to continue its efforts in this regard and to present new ideas to engage with other Abrahamic faiths in order to spread tolerance and acceptance across the globe. As His Majesty King Abdullah emphasized in an address to the United Nations General Assembly on interfaith dialogue in 2008, we all have a responsibility to be involved in “moving the discussion forward: out of the conference rooms; and into the world’s homes, schools, offices and lives.”

#### Strengthening Economic Cooperation, Supporting Development

Jordan is eternally grateful to the US Congress and the various administrations we have worked with for generously supporting Jordan’s progress and ongoing development.

Through US economic assistance to Jordan and through the Free Trade Agreement, the first with an Arab country, we continue to move forward with economic liberalization, growth and socioeconomic development. US assistance has supported and contributed to advancing Jordan's water, health, education and tourism sectors. It also has helped the Jordanian government reduce foreign debt and address challenges created by the influx of Iraqis into Jordan.

Our trade relations have also improved tremendously. Today, the United States stands to be Jordan's second largest trading partner with the volume of trade reaching more than one billion US dollars. Jordan's business leaders and the Jordanian government will continue to cooperate closely with their counterparts in the United States to seek new economic opportunities in order to further enhance our trade relations.

Our relationship also rests on a strong basis of cooperation in the areas of education and culture. Thousands of Jordanian students, including myself, have lived and studied in the United States, gaining experience and equipping ourselves with the necessary tools to build a knowledge economy in Jordan that is based on innovation, critical thinking and creativity. Every year, thousands of American tourists, volunteers, businessmen, educators, civil society leaders and students visit Jordan, and their number is on the rise. This is testimony to the breadth of our longstanding friendship.

#### Towards a Lasting Friendship

As Jordan's Ambassador to the United States, and by virtue of my various travels across this great country, in my meetings, conferences and discussions with US officials, business leaders, journalists, civil society advocates and American citizens at large, I am always impressed by the extraordinary warmth of the American people—and to realize just how extensive our friendships are. This makes us very proud. But like all relationships, nothing can be taken for granted. In that spirit, we will continue to work for the values that sustain us all—in particular service to humanity and moderation—and for the shared objective of realizing the common good.