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Chronological: Hannibal Club, USA, U.S.-Tunisia Relations, 1999-06-21

Senator Daniel K. Inouye Papers
Speeches, Box SP12, Folder 7
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Thank you for this award in recognition of my contributions to US-Tunisia relations.

However, I have played only a small role in the more than 200 years of friendship between our two countries. On August 28, 1797, Tunisia and the United States signed a Treaty of Peace and Friendship which guaranteed our young republic freedom of navigation in Tunisia's territorial waters and freedom of trade with Tunisian citizens.

Despite this more than 200 year history, Americans do not know very much about Tunisia. In fact, I doubt most Americans could find Tunisia on a map. Its location on the Mediterranean Sea made Tunisia's assistance to our country's merchant fleet invaluable for the expansion of our trade in the 1800s. Tunisia played an important role in World War II when our military forces fought in and traveled through Tunisia in an effort to liberate Europe.

In 1956, the United States was the first country to recognize the newly independent Republic of Tunisia, and its government. For more than 35 years, the U.S. Agency for International Development worked in Tunisia to assist in the construction of the Tunis-Carthage airport, universities, dams, irrigations projects, and rural clinics.

Tunisia was the first Arab country to request and receive Peace Corps volunteers who educated Tunisians about agricultural development, health care, education, youth development, and urban planning. The remarkable social and economic gains made in Tunisia have led to the recent closing of our AID and Peace Corps programs.

Last year, the United States exported 350 million dollars worth of goods to Tunisia. In 1997, there were 153 million dollars of direct U.S. investment in Tunisia. Last year, a U.S.-led consortium won a bid for a power plant project worth between 400 and 500 million dollars.

As our economic relationship grows, I hope our diplomatic ties will strengthen. Tunisia has taken an active role in the Middle East peace process for which I am particularly grateful. Unfortunately, this effort has stalled, but I am confident that with the newly elected government in Israel we will begin to move forward once again.

Stability in this region is of paramount importance to both our countries. I thank Tunisia for its past efforts and I look forward to continuing to work together toward this goal.

As tourism to Tunisia increases, I hope more Americans will travel to Tunisia to learn of its culture and history and to meet its people. It is only through this type of common framework that our citizens can begin to truly understand one another and learn from one another.

Tunisia has much to offer and I hope that today's children will learn more about Tunisia and the great accomplishments of Hannibal, than what they learn from playing the computer game the Great Battles of Hannibal.

I commend the Hannibal Club USA for its efforts to broaden the cultural and economic links between our two countries and thank you for this award.