



Excellencies, Honorable senators, distinguished guests,

It is indeed an honor and a distinct pleasure for me to be with you today to celebrate once again the democratic system of government and highlight its importance and significance to citizens around the world. Allow me to thank Ms. Geertje Standhardt Curator of the Montesquieu Prince's Lecture for the generous invitation extended to me to take part to this important meeting to celebrate democracy. This celebration takes even more relevance in light of the violence we see around us on a daily basis and which democratic nations, old-established and nascent are facing. It is indeed an assault on freedom and its various manifestation: our common heritage, our shared values of tolerance, mutual acceptance and peaceful coexistence.

When I received the invitation and read the summary of the "Prince's Festival", the first thought that flashed in my mind was that democracy can never be taken for granted. It needs to be nurtured every day, revisited frequently and strengthened with the involvement, the input and the commitment of the citizens.

The second thought I had was that democracy is not a fixed element in the political radar screen which can be reached one day. It is a process which is in continuous evolution. It offers a tool, a space for growth and an ideal towards which we strive and against which we measure our freedom and fulfillment.

The third thought was that in a democratic construction there are no shortcuts, no "one size fits all" and no copy/paste method. We share the common human values and principles, the legitimate aspirations for betterment but, when it comes to the "how", we need to go through the process on the basis of unique, distinct experience.

Seven months ago, on the 9th of February, I transferred power as Head of Government to my successor. The ceremony marked a major event in Tunisia not only because we were not used to its occurrence but because it is happening peacefully and, particularly, because it represented the completion of a phase in the democratic process we have embarked upon. It was indeed a celebration not of the advent of democracy but of the adherence of the nation to this political orientation.

This factor need to be strongly highlighted: If my Government succeeded in taking the country through a full electoral cycle, from the announcement to the transfer of power ceremony, it is because it was able to transform the nation's will into a practical process with clear benchmarks and a fully honored ethical commitment.

In fact, throughout my tenure of office, I insisted on the respect of the electoral calendar despite several calls to postpone the election date. I also repeatedly reiterated my commitment not to run for office in the upcoming elections and continuously acted upon it. I made sure that my Governmental team understood the moral value of my commitment and I must say that they fully supported my decision.

Some outside observers may question this decision and judge it negatively from a political angle of opportunity but I believe that in a democratic construction (as in any other edifice), the foundations determine the solidity of the final building. Tunisian nascent democracy needed a strong and clear ethical and moral reference and I believed I had the opportunity and the responsibility of establishing it.



When I met President Obama during my visit to Washington, he asked me what made the Tunisian experience succeed against serious odds. I told him that in Tunisia we do not have the culture of absolutes and we have developed several characteristics including moderation and the sense of compromise. I must confess that these traits of the Tunisian character have been instrumental in allowing my Government to move forward.

In this context, I can recall the difficulties the country experienced in 2013 with two political assassinations and a situation of total political blockage. Many observers forecasted the end of the Tunisian Spring and the democratic aspirations of the people. But the people's realism and commitment manifested itself through civil society actions and the tradition of moderation coupled with a keen sense of responsibility finally carried the day and brought the process back on track. The strong awareness of the profound historical legacy and of the crucial importance of the Tunisian experience for the entire region as a living proof that democratic transformation is possible, gave us that necessary push to refocus our action and search for common ground of understanding.

Knowing who we are and what we needed to achieve allowed us to make compromises without compromising ourselves or the objectives of our democratic transformation process.

In fact, the capacity of Tunisians to adapt and accept progressive steps is another characteristic we inherited from late Habib Bourguiba, the first President of Tunisia. dialogue, inclusive approach and incremental progress could be the summary of our demarche and its successful outcome.

Indeed, when the crisis looked unsolvable, we devised the idea of the national dialogue conducted by a quartet made of the four major national organizations and with the participation of a large number of political parties. this approach led to the establishment of a Government of high competences and expertise but with no political affiliation or loyalty. Some have called it a government of technocrats and some others a government of transition. As the Head of that Government, I saw in it a group of very dedicated and focused officials who accepted the difficulties and the stressful situations which are bound to come with the job because they believed in the need to serve and in the capacity of the country to set the course right.

However, this government which I picked individually, would not have succeeded without a vision, a strategy and a plan of action. These components of our action were clearly drawn from the beginning and discussed with each member of the team to ensure their total and unwavering commitment. We presented the entire approach, the rationale behind each orientation and the intended results in our inauguration speech before Parliament. We have chosen transparency as our communication mechanism to make sure the people is aware of the reality of the situation and what it requires in terms of corrective measures and innovative ideas to relaunch the economic engine of the country and establish the solid platform on which major reforms will be initiated. It is always easier to ask for sacrifices from people when they know what you are trying to achieve.

I must say, however, that this entire edifice is now under a serious threat from the collective enemy all democracies, old established like yours or nascent like ours, are facing which is radicalism and terrorism.

Tunisia is now a target because the success it had achieved and the potential it represents contradict the ideas these merchants of death, despair and destruction are selling to our youth. Our tradition, our history, as I have explained have never experienced these types of radical behaviors or been conducive to it. Our country has always been synonymous of tolerance, moderation and openness and these dark ideologies are as strange to our society as they are to any other civilized nation.



In this war against terrorism, preventive measures are essential. In the case of Tunisia, these groups have taken advantage of the weakness of the state in the early years of the revolution and the prevailing mood of uncertainty within the rank and file of the police forces to smuggle weapons and people. They also used the new atmosphere of freedom to disseminate their discourse of hatred and destruction.

Immediately after my inauguration as Head of Government, I stated that there is no place for terrorism in Tunisia and made the war on terrorism my priority. We invested time, money and effort to identify these elements, track them and act preemptively to hit them on all levels, leadership, support structures and active elements. This strategy had also an educational and cultural component and was further complemented by a whole network of international cooperation schemes.

To a large extent, it has succeeded but the country could not sustain it primarily, for lack of means. The current leadership in Tunisia has clearly reiterated the commitment to eradicate terrorism in the country and is exerting a determined effort to see this through.

It is today a proven reality that no one country can wage and win this war alone. It is equally true that the security measures alone are not sufficient as terrorism is a multifaceted phenomenon which feeds on a variety of factors: ignorance, despair, social rejection, personality complexes, religious dogma and many others.

To counter this destructive ideology, we need to mobilize all our means in a complementary, across borders policy which strengthens the position of all those, particularly among youth, who are resisting these radical movements. We need to help them develop programs and actions which can show to their peers that there is a successful alternative based on shared universal values and a keen sense of cultural identity.

Your Excellencies,

Being with you today is another symbol that we must never waste a day without adding a new stone to the democratic edifice we are building. No matter how old or young our democratic tradition may be, it can never be taken for granted. It is a road always under construction. In this endeavor we stand together and as late President Nelson Mandela said about South Africa: "It is not our diversity which divides us; it is not our ethnicity, or religion or culture that divides us. Since we have achieved our freedom, there can only be one division amongst us: between those who cherish democracy and those who do not."

Thank you.