

## **To: The Middle East and North Africa Regional (MENAR) Fellowship Program**

It is with sincere gratitude and honor that I write today to thank you for this wonderful opportunity to work abroad in Morocco for one year. It has been a true privilege to be the first MENAR Fellow, and I hope I am fulfilling most, if not all expectations. Almost five months into my Fellowship, I am excited to be able, finally, to explain to my friends and acquaintances in Morocco what exactly it is I do.

The Amadeus Institute was founded in 2008 with the mandate to fill a void in African research centers that would synthesize and analyze ideas as well as sociopolitical trends. Part of this ambition rests on the annual hosting of one of the largest conferences on the continent of Africa: the MEDays Forum, which, by bringing in experts and officials from the world over, becomes an international stage for Africa.

I am proud to be able to say that I spent the summer and fall after my Princeton graduation working alongside Moroccan (and one French) colleagues to prepare for the fifth edition of this MEDays Forum, an impressive three-day affair that is open to the public. Of the many panels this year, several dealt with ecology, development, security, governance, and with economic vitalization. The theme this year was the development of southern countries, and it was the stated ambition of the Institute to act as the voice of African nations.

I was given full ownership of several panels around the theme of governance and security. While the panel topics had already been selected (the Iran nuclear file; AfPak post-ISAF retreat; and one plenary on the question of representation – from the Arab Spring to the protests in Europe), I was given carte blanche on how to frame the issues and discussions. Over the following months, I identified, invited, followed up, and finalized the logistics of the participation of speakers whose points of views, expertise, and experience I found particularly compelling. In short, between July and November I delved into these issues of great personal interest while concomitantly learning how truly colossal the work required to organize a large conference is.

The MEDays Forum is both a prestigious and original conference (based in a “tent-village” in Tangier), and it was truly inspiring to meet many of the speakers. I had the chance to talk at length with the speakers I had invited, including some important officials such as Romania’s state-secretary, the EU representative to the Mediterranean, the EU representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan, and so forth. Personally, I most cherished talking with the experts and former officials on my panels, whose points of views were not constrained by the current diplomatic positions they held. Watching my panels unfold gave me a great sense of accomplishment and pride. It was an incredible experience, to say the least, for a recent graduate.

Yet it is from an experience outside the realm of my responsibilities as coordinator of the Forum, that I came closer to understanding the true mandate of a think tank. One of the speakers I was most pleased to have invited was Fawzia Koofi, the vice-president of the Afghan National Assembly, President of the Commission on Women and Civil Society, and a staunch women’s rights activist. Mrs. Koofi is widely respected within her own country and abroad, where she is perhaps best known for her book *Letters to My Daughters*. She is also running for President of Afghanistan in 2014, and I succeeded in contacting her through her campaign manager. It was in our subsequent correspondence that Fawzia asked me to arrange a series of meetings between her delegation and

Moroccan parliamentarians and stakeholders on a law for the elimination of violence against women. The meetings could take place on the margins of the Forum. Their objective, she explained, was to share experiences between Muslim countries on the question of women's rights legislation. It was then that I understood that our Institute could serve as a platform for the exchange of knowledge and strategies.

Over the next couple of months, on the sidelines of my duties for the Forum, I worked diligently to prepare a comprehensive program for Mrs. Koofi. I educated myself on the question of violence against women legislation in Morocco. I also sought the advice of a human rights attorney who had participated in the NGO drafting of a law for its elimination (EVAW), a 101-clause bill that activists have been lobbying the Moroccan Parliament to pass. The trip of Fawzia Koofi's delegation was funded by UN Women's Kabul office, which also provided an Afghan-French interpreter. I accepted to undertake all logistic preparations (hotel, transportation, flights), which was made somewhat difficult by the very last-minute confirmations on the part of the Afghan delegates, who all required visas. As part of the logistics of organizing the visit, I prepared a document on the objectives of the visit, a visit program, and an itemized budget for UN Women, along with the required formal invitation to the delegates for the visa process.



*Fawzia Koofi and her delegation from Afghanistan*

Meeting Fawzia and participating in these meetings has been the highlight of my time with the Amadeus Institute so far. Her delegation consisted of two men and one woman, and was comprised of three other parliamentarians, including the Chairman of the Commission on Widows and Disabled People, and the Secretary of the Commission on Women. During our discussions in the days prior to her delegation's arrival, Fawzia revealed to me the true importance of their visit: the Afghan Parliament was preparing to pass amendments to reinforce the law for the elimination of violence against women and to promote a reformed family code. She had prepared a series of seminars on the question between opponents and supporters later that month, to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on November 25. One of the parliamentarians she had invited to Morocco was an opponent of the law and the visit would hopefully serve to make him realize the importance of the legislation, and to share his experience with fellow parliamentarians upon his return. Fawzia told me she would have to return some days early – as a single parent she could not stay abroad too long – and she asked me to ensure the success of the meetings she would miss.

Half of the meetings were in French and the others in Classical Arabic, which I understood to some extent. The meetings were fascinating, and I keyed in on the particular Islamic focus they took, as well as sifted through the diplomatic necessities of the exchanges. The Afghan delegates were extremely well prepared, having read and studied the Moroccan Family Code in surprising detail. They met with a variety of stakeholders on the Moroccan front over two and a half days.

I am indebted to the flexibility and trust the Amadeus Institute bestowed on me which enabled me to realize this project. My supervisor was very supportive of my project. While the Secretary-General informed me that they had never done such a project before, she allowed me to pursue it, and agreed for the Institute to cover the delegation's one-day stay in Tangier for the conclusion of the Forum. I worked independently on the project, something I know I would have been unlikely to be able to do anywhere else. The Secretary-General also allowed me to take alternative vacation days, as the meetings fell on the Institute's week off, and helped with resources such as a travel agency for transportation booking. It was agreed that I would write a report and article on the visit. My excitement for the project, and my explanations of the importance of the visit and of Fawzia Koofi for her country's future, led the President of the Institute to bestow one of the 2012 MEDays Prizes to her, under the new theme of "Prize for Political Initiative." This move gained approbation and pride from Afghans through social media and I am sure beyond.

I am extremely grateful to the MENAR Fellowship Program for having made possible this unique opportunity. Just months after graduating from the Woodrow Wilson School with a focus on the Middle East and North Africa, I have had the opportunity to pursue these very interests in a country with a remarkably intricate culture and sociopolitical reality, and to help bring to life a first-rate gathering of some of the most important minds and officials around the world. I not only witnessed but enabled an important series of meetings between the representatives of two countries still very much struggling with women's rights issues – an experience that helped to solidify my own career interests in human rights law. The resources here at the Institute and unlocked by your tremendous kindness, have allowed me, in turn, to discover what I can accomplish and contribute.

Sincerely,

**Tal Eisenzweig**  
**Princeton in Africa/MENAR Fellow 2012-2013**