



**Kingdom of Morocco  
Parliament  
House of Representatives**

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**Keynote Address of Mr Rachid Talbi El Alami  
President of the House of Representatives**

**Summit of Speakers – 12<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session**

**Conference of the Parliamentary Assembly  
of the Union for the Mediterranean**

**Tangier – 28 May 2016**

**Honourable Speakers,  
Honourable Ministers,  
Excellencies, Colleagues, Friends, Brothers and Sisters,  
Distinguished Guests,**

We are tremendously excited about this Mediterranean parliamentary gathering, as we host the 12<sup>th</sup> Session of the Conference of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean. We sincerely appreciate the honour extended to us by our friends, brothers, and sisters in this Parliamentary Assembly to host this conference in the Kingdom of Morocco, and particularly here in the city of Tangier.

Tangier embodies multiple layers of symbolism; it boasts a legendary past as a Mediterranean city par excellence, harbouring its own historical, civilizational, cultural, and geographical secrets. The city, on one side, and the European coast, on the other, overlook each other; when the sky is clear and unclouded, the people of Tangier and their Spanish neighbours, a mere 14km away across Mediterranean water, can actually perceive each other.

Thanks to its strategic geographical location, Tangier makes all of us in Morocco sense a creative interaction with Europe's civilizational and cultural vibrations.

Like Babel and Alexandria, Tangier has its own profound mythical dimension. In the *Odyssey*, Ulysses manages to come all the way to its shores, and so do the armies of Hercules. Because Tangier overlooks the water strip separating – or, rather, connecting – Mediterranean waters with the Atlantic Ocean (a meeting of two seas that you can observe by simply standing atop Cape Spartel here), numerous sailors, adventurers, travellers, geographers, and conquerors throughout history have talked about this city.

This is the city that gave birth to Tariq ibn Ziyad, who led the crossing into Andalusia, and to Ibn Battuta, the famed traveller who compiled one of the most important travelogues in which he chronicled his visits to a wide range of lands, countries, and realms further afield.

Celebrated writers, thinkers, and artists from Mediterranean countries, from Europe, from the United States, and even from Japan and Latin America, have all come to Tangier, and wrote lively accounts about this city. In his collection of short stories, *The Alef and Other Stories*, the world-renowned author, Jorge Luis Borges, wrote: “Homer and I went our separate ways at the portals of Tangier; I do not think we said goodbye.”

Phoenicians, Greeks, Carthaginians, Arab Muslims – all have reached Tangier, and all have been awed by the stretch of its sea into ocean. Some even took Tangier to be the edge of the world, the point where the land mass ends and the ocean begins and continues into infinity, into what ancient Arabs referred to as *Bahr ad-Dolomat* (“Sea of Darkness”), as opposed to the Mediterranean Sea, which they called *al-Bahr al-Abyad al-Moutawasset* (“the Middling White Sea”).

This city has always been Africa’s gateway to Europe, and Europe’s gateway to Africa. In fact, Tangier had once been among Africa’s gateways to the New World after Christopher Columbus discovered America.

Today, the Moroccan state is paying a high level of attention to the status and future of this city in order to ensure that it continues to play its historical, civilizational, cultural, economic, and social roles. His Majesty King Mohammed VI, may Allah preserve him, oversees in person the progress of major projects across Tangier and its region, conducting field follow-ups through all development stages, from storyboarding to delivery. Proof of what has been accomplished so far can be seen in large-scale infrastructures, namely the Tanger-Med Port, one of the world’s largest, as well as in the scope of industrial and tourism investments, and air and land transport structures.

Indeed, there is so much to say about Tangier and its wider area. For several years, I have held executive office in this region and, as such, I know the value that it represents for the wider economic and social evolution of the kingdom.

But the main point in telling you about Tangier is to bring you, Honourable Speakers, closer to a city that has never given up its Mediterranean identity, or its role as a vital continental link – whether symbolically, civilizational, culturally, or economically – between the African north and the European south.

As I have said on a previous occasion, some of our European friends, particularly in northern-European countries, think that Morocco is too far from them, when in reality, by dint of their belonging to the European Union, they too are Morocco’s neighbours. They too are tied to Morocco by the very fabric of current issues, which are never devoid of reasons for worry and concern. They are linked to Morocco by a shared destiny, as well. And by a shared ambition to build a common future; a future that is premised on development projects and ideas, on the preservation of a healthy ecosystem, on paying adequate and continuous attention to security matters, on tackling issues of illegal immigration, human trafficking, drug trafficking, illegal-arms dealing, organised crime, and so on.

**Dear Colleagues,  
Honourable Speakers,**

Since the inception of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean (PA-UfM) – first in 2004 in the form of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, then under its current name since 2010 – the Moroccan parliament has assiduously worked to strengthen this platform. Morocco has always actively and effectively engaged in PA-UfM's dynamics, considering that it constitutes for us, as for all other members, an asset for joint parliamentary action, a mechanism of cooperation, and an affirmation of our common will.

Such will that we have reaffirmed in Lisbon Conference when we assumed the rotating presidency of this Parliamentary Assembly (PA), and later in the PA's Bureau meeting in February 2016 in Rabat. Our common will consists in continuing our Euro-Mediterranean dialogue and joining our efforts to support peace, security, stability, and more cooperation in our region, as well as working towards deepening and consolidating our democratic paradigm.

A shared will, for sure. But also a shared awareness of the issues and challenges at hand, of the threats that need to be overcome, and of the measures and mechanisms that we must elaborate and continuously discuss and consult each other about. There is no doubt that we sense these challenges and dangers in the same way.

The threat of terrorism, for instance, has become a source of constant fear and worry for all of us, knocking daily on our doors. Every day we ask the same questions about this attack or that, in this Euro-Mediterranean country or that, and with every passing day, the severity, the brutality, and the bloodlust only increase.

Perhaps what is most concerning today is that terrorism tries to hide behind religion, cheapening the lives of innocent people using sometimes the name of Islam, while Islam is innocent of such undertakings. Terrorism also claims to stand up for oppressed peoples and countries around the world, as if these people would ever assign criminals to speak on their behalf.

It is equally concerning that terrorists have taken to hiding among the thousands of immigrants and refugees escaping civil strife and armed conflicts. They capitalise on the humanitarianism, ethics, and rights culture in some host countries to spread their bloody ideology, wreak havoc, and create total confusion, attempting to foment the worst sort of a *fait accompli*.

Even democracies now are threatened by the spread of extremist populist rhetoric on immigration, such rhetoric that increasingly undermines the systems, institutions, and identities of nations, instead of working towards a regulated and creative form of immigration, one that is productive economically, socially, culturally, and civilizationaly.

It is unfortunate today that some nations of the South – the Global South, the South of the Mediterranean, the Sub-Sahel, and the Sub-Sahara – not only face poverty, extremism, and other perils like war, tensions, armed conflicts, military coups, and state failure, but they also have to cope with natural and environmental issues such as desertification, sand encroachment, and climate-change repercussions on economic and social development projects, and on social cohesion and stability. These challenges also affect socio-cultural expressions that are part of a tangible and intangible cultural and civilizational capital, thus threatening the very components of national and local identity.

These are dangerous trends, and what makes them even more dangerous is that they are connected. As such, we must all realise that nobody is immune from these dangers, and we are required to be fully aware of the joint responsibility we have to bear, and the challenges we have to overcome.

What we really need to do is to have a shared will to face our common threats, and rise to our common challenges, and going together towards our common destinies.

We must start to shape our own reality instead of letting reality shape us. We must also be pre-emptive in our strategizing, in our economy, in our culture, and in our security; that has become our conviction now in Morocco.

A number of friends, allies, and observers assert the importance of Morocco as a stable country and a sanctuary for dialogue, investment, and productive effort; in fact, some consider our country – for good reason – to be an exception in a region riddled with tensions, conflicts, and outbursts. Be this as it may, Morocco, which has set a model for security efficiency and proactive vigilance, understands all too well the importance of cooperating with its friends, brothers, and neighbours in addressing the various challenges at hand.

We have been pleased and honoured by friends who have underlined Morocco's efforts in the area of security, counter-terrorism, and counter-extremism in the Maghreb and the Sahel, with everyone agreeing that the latter area has become a

veritable security backyard for the Mediterranean and Euro-Mediterranean region.

In this respect, Morocco strongly insists on the importance of building up the Maghreb as a strategic priority that should rise above all subjective considerations that are neither consistent with our era of consolidated blocs, nor with the march of history, nor with the need to prepare for the future. Morocco has also insisted on the importance of resolving the Libyan crisis, and has indeed taken concrete initiatives in this direction, effectively contributing to the attainment of an impartial settlement to the crisis.

By the same token, we look forward to the participation of PA-UfM members, each from their position and within their ability, in calling for and working towards the re-launch of the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations process, in order to reach formulas for a just and fair settlement of the Palestinian cause and to meet the aspirations of the Palestinian people for an independent nation-state, with Eastern Jerusalem as its capital, based on the rules and principles of legitimacy and international law.

All of us understand that the absence of such a justice in the Middle East, and the double standards applied by some in dealing with the Palestinian cause, dim hopes for peace, security, and stability in the region, in the Mediterranean space, and in the world at large. This is also one of the main causes of tension, hatred, grudges, extremism, and terrorism.

If one adds in the implications and outcomes of the wars taking place in a number of Middle Eastern countries, and the deterioration of the economic and social conditions there, one is bound to realise the extent to which the misery of certain social segments can be used to fuel despair, nihilism, extremism, armed violence, and the embrace of death and suicide as a culture and an ideology.

We must be factors for life and agents of hope. Such is our duty, as representatives of our respective peoples, who deserve to live, and to do so in dignity.

Once again, I welcome you all to Tangier, in the land of Morocco. I welcome you to your second home country, wishing you all a pleasant stay, and hoping that the proceedings of our conference would be successful in consolidating our shared will and commitment, our closeness, our cooperation, and our dialogue.