



Under the high patronage of His Excellency Mr Béji Caïd Essebsi, President of the Republic of Tunisia

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**“Towards boosting and activating joint Islamic
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**Presentation on the efforts and outcomes of education
reform in the Republic of Tunisia**

FOR AN EQUITABLE AND HIGHLY PERFORMING TUNISIAN SCHOOL THAT BUILDS THE CITIZEN AND DEVELOPS THE COUNTRY

Immediately after the Revolution, the Tunisian people faced a number of challenges posed by the emergency of undertaking deep reforms in different aspects of the life of Tunisians. While the political issues got much attention due to the upheavals which took place in the country, Tunisians consistently demanded the reform of education as they consider it as a fundamental issue which overlaps with other concerns and represents the keystone of changing the destiny of the whole nation.

In fact, that demand embodied a deep-rooted determination in the Tunisian people who has for so long relied on education to improve the lives of people. Modern history of Tunisia clearly shows examples of the strong relationship between the great social and political changes and the educational reforms to the extent that each new historical stage has its own educational system.

Tunisians' aspirations and expectations are even greater given that the educational system has reached an easy to

spot degree of weakness at all levels: a dilapidated infrastructures, poor students' learning quality, disappointing performances, growing numbers of drop-outs, unemployment rates are soaring. In addition to a number of unusual and degrading practices penetrated the disturbed educational space such as absenteeism of both teachers and students, smoking, drug addiction, violence...

Successive governments have tried to redress the situation through local interventions. However, the temporary character of such interventions, the pressure of the political rivalries and sometimes the limited vision have all impeded efforts to satisfy that national demand. But after the adoption of the new constitution which initiated a substantial democratic transition, the constitutional institutions have started to function making major reforms possible. Being the first urgent one, the reform of the educational system was launched by the Ministry of Education only days after setting up the current government in February 2015.

1- THE CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND OF REFORM:

1.1- Characteristics of the current Tunisian school and the requirements of reform: From diagnostic to evaluation

Reform requires an objective diagnostic of the current situation of education in Tunisia and a comprehensive evaluation based on a scientific approach adopting internationally recognized standards and indicators in order to have a clear vision of what should be done to develop the performance of the educational system and improve the quality of its outputs.

The studies conducted by different bodies have led to a general consensus on describing the consequences of problems besetting our Tunisian school, including:

- The decreasing performance of the educational process and the poor level of students' learning in the basic scientific subjects and languages including Arabic, together with a limited acquisition of knowledge and contents to the detriment of horizontal competencies and integrated skills, badly affected students' performances in advanced educational levels and induced a student-knowledge relationship based on a direct pragmatic and momentary need that ends with passing exams. They also crippled their ability to integrate in the job market and active life in general. This diagnostic is further confirmed by the results scored by our students in international tests throughout successive sessions. With these concern-raising indicators, the aggravation of the phenomenon of school dropout and failure has a great social impact.
- The Tunisian school has failed in preserving the principle of equal opportunity as a result of the flagrant disparities between the regions and between institutions inside the same region in infrastructures, stable human resources and the logistic potentials. It also failed to find adequate methods and mechanisms to benefit from various intelligences and the different forms of learning among students, valuation of the student's right to build his/her school and professional project which suits his/her personal profile and disposition. Furthermore, the school can't ensure the right of persons with special needs to a personalized education that may provide them with the qualifications needed for integration in social and professional lives.
- The gap between the school and its economic surrounding is getting even wider as the existing school disciplines and programs at all educational levels has become unable to satisfy neither the needs of society nor the expectations from training offers in the light of the decline of vocational training in the Tunisian professional training system and of the emergence of a new framework of professions where trades grow outside the realm of training and sometimes faster than the pace of basic vocational training development. In addition, employment criteria are now more based on skills than diplomas and classical knowledge. Invaded by new shameful phenomena such as violence, cheating, drug addiction, anarchy and extremism and counter co-existence practices which pose a great threat to our children, the school has become even weaker as they affect the atmosphere of relations inside the educational institutions. With very poor performance of dialogue and listening mechanisms and of measures of social, psychological and educational accompaniment, school life has so deteriorated that some qualify the situation as a total moral crisis.
- The emergence of a strong need for a new pattern of governance and for new educational management methods that reduce dropout and advance the educational institution towards upholding the principles of transparency, checking and accountability on the one hand, and on the other hand the principle of decentralization regionally and locally in accordance with the aspiration of all Tunisians to build local democracy and give regions more independence to act and manage their local affairs and develop their educational and pedagogical initiatives.
- The inability of the Tunisian school to keep up with the deep and fast changes in information and communication technologies and benefit from the immense learning potentials provided by scientific and technological progress within the framework of the world's transition towards knowledge and information societies, the growing digital and virtual economy, the decline of the traditional

learning structure in the face of the growing competition of non-formal education in the world.

- The remarkable decline of the General Secondary Education Certificate (GSEC) results in recent years and the preoccupying disparities between regions and between educational institutions in the same region with indicators showing a widening gap between the different provinces of the country not only in terms of success rates but also in terms of the nature of study departments predominant in some regions other than in others which has an impact on the type of qualifications and skills of people in that region.
- The deterioration of school infrastructures and the decline of life standards inside schools to a level far under that of students inside their families. In addition, classrooms contain no more than tables making learning spaces and school life in general repulsive and unwelcoming to students.

These above-stated diagnostic elements, and more others, have been in recent years the major problem which prevented the school from conducting a reform that may raise performance and output quality to the desired international standards. In fact, the Tunisian student's performance has decreased in international competitions and the Tunisian school's role in educating and qualifying young people to address the challenges posed by the job market and life in general has also shrunk.

1.2- The Contexts of reform:

1.2.1: The international context:

With the beginning of the third millennium, major transformation factors have been reshaping the international context and have imposed new criteria of success for individuals, institutions, peoples as well as nations. No matter how different and diverse they may be, these factors are the result of two interacting causes: globalization with its different facets and the technological revolution with its incessant development and ability to penetrate all aspects of human activity.

The new developments at the international context have further upgraded the strategic value of acquiring information, own and better use it within knowledge-based economies and societies. As such, they pose new challenges which not only involve seeking to master means of development and prosperity, but also securing means of survival and continuity.

The main criterion for success within this new context is competition. From it stem other criteria like the ability to keep

up, benefit from and adapt with the latest developments, acquire skills of research, development and innovation, provide for the requirements of quality and seek a better use and development of available resources. The Tunisian school, seeking to fully play again and develop its social, developmental, civilizational role, is required today as never before to lead the institutions working to keep pace with and assimilate those developments so as to ensure that their outcomes are consistent with the international standards and the needs of our youth for knowledge, skills and qualifications required for success within this new context.

The educational reform project in our country which has often been open to other countries of the world should interact with international law and take into account human rights' international and regional conventions ratified by the Republic of Tunisia, mainly those which guarantee the right to education within the framework of the international community's endeavor to ensure the best living conditions for the human kind. Hence, any reform may not be undertaken in Tunisia without taking into account the efforts exerted by the peoples of the world to develop education. Tunisia has been an active partner in developing the international vision to reform and develop education through its participation in most international forums and meetings. In this framework, Tunisia has pledged to take the measures necessary for accomplishing a reform that is deeply rooted in its environment and consistent with the vision of the international movement for "Education for All", launched in Jomtien in 1990 and adopted in Dakar at the World Education Forum held in April 2000, which considers the "quality of education" one of the greatest international concerns in view of the poor quality of learning and the slow progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals relating to education. Today, all countries of the world must promote the right to quality education as a universal inalienable right, as an empowerment means that allows young people to acquire knowledge, skills and qualifications which prepare them for life and employment and as the basis prerequisite for enforcing all other rights. This international tendency was strengthened in the World Education Forum held in May 2015 in Incheon, South Korea which issued "Incheon Declaration" under the theme: "Equitable and inclusive quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030. Transforming lives through education". The declaration adopted by the UN Secretary General's initiative "Education First" as an initiative that actively contributes to promote the political commitment of governments, regional organizations, government and non-government organizations to develop education and improve its quality.

The Republic of Tunisia's joining the international movement of "Education for All" is totally consistent with the educa-



tional reform experience accumulated by Tunisia thanks to the efforts the Tunisian education militants have deployed since the nineteenth century and particularly since independence.

"Education For All" is founded on a vision that is consistent with our national view as it observes the principle of "education first" and recognizes that the role of education is an important factor to self-development and the indispensable means to achieve the other sustainable development goals. This vision sustains the fundamental belief that through education people's life can be changed. This view is also in line with the commitment of the Republic of Tunisia regarding the program the Arab League Education, Science and Culture Organization (ALESCO) undertakes to implement following its adoption by the Arab ministers of education at the conference held in Doha in 2010 which is a program that aims at improving the quality of education to upgrade its output and achieve the recognized international standards in the field.

The Republic of Tunisia' joining the international movement for "Education for All", with its human objectives, means the recognition of:

- The right of all to a quality education without discrimination whatsoever.
- The right to education as a basis and prerequisite for all other rights.
- The right to education as a means to transform and develop the lives of people.
- The right to education as a fundamental means of sustainable human development: the development of individuals, peoples and societies.

1.2.2: The local context:

The problems of the educational system and its poor performance have raised wide controversy among educational actors and draw the attention of the national community namely after the revolution. In fact, this represents a new round of criticism having being leveled at the educational system for more than a decade. Nevertheless, such criticism should not make us ignore the achievements scored by the current educational system. A critical reading of previous reforms shows that those achievements may be credited to the educational experience accumulated by Tunisia since the nineteenth century to further enrich the reform Tunisia is embarked on.

The decision taken by the Ministry of Education is expressed in "the methodological document for reforming the educational system" prepared on the occasion of launching the national dialogue on reforming the educational system on 23 April 2015 at the Conference Palace. The document

states that education has been throughout the modern history of our country, thanks to generous efforts that continued for decades, the cornerstone that supports the institutions of a civil society, and upholds the identity of the modern Tunisian citizens. The reforms of education have often ranked high among the concerns of the successive generations of the builders of modern Tunisia. Those reforms have been the essence of Tunisia's modernization, in particular "the Republican School", which was established immediately after independence by generations of Tunisians. Being aware of future challenges, our school has been able, thanks to its enlightened culture, excellent competencies and outstanding skilled human resources who are filled with loyalty towards Tunisia, to build the institutions of the modern national institutions of Tunisia, largely emancipate the feeling of nationalism and enrich the modern Tunisian thought. The elites of past generations had endeavored, albeit differently, to accomplish the tasks required for developing our contemporary history. At last, their dream of building a democratic modern state may become true with the possibilities the new Tunisian constitution provides.

The Ministry of Education believes that "the Tunisian school has scored many achievements the importance of which cannot be ignored today. Instead, the current situation requires us to sustain and promote them. The Tunisian school has played a central role in shaping the Tunisian national personality and making the Tunisian citizen who is open to the principles of modernity; the citizen who combines the national identity awareness with a sense of belonging to the Arab Islamic civilization. The national school has been able to firmly establish education and learning and enshrine their value within the Tunisian conscience as a basic condition for social and economic development within a national project that sets school as catalyst and factor for social change".

Hence, the Ministry of Education's approach to reform takes into account past achievements through a critical and analytic approach to the principles and ideas society and elites have developed throughout generations which all relate to the place of education within the Tunisian social, historical and cultural context. Since the nineteenth century, the Tunisian school has been a driving force for the modernization movement of the Tunisian society that was initiated by Ahmed Bey with the foundation of the Military School in Bardo in 1840, and the Sadiki College founded by Kheireddine Pacha al-Tunisi in 1875. The movements which aimed at reforming and modernizing Al-Zayfouna educational system further strengthened all the attempts seeking to make of the Tunisian school a national institution entitled to lead the intellectual, social, and economic development of the country. Actually,

those attempts represented the aspirations of the first reformers in the nineteenth century, and still remains a true concern that guides the current reform as it did for past successive ones in order to comprehensively develop the individual through adequately qualifying him/her to meet the ever growing and changing social needs. The reform of Al-Zaytouna educational system and its consequential foundation of the "Al Khaldounia School" reflect the incessant endeavor of the Tunisian school to adapt with the intellectual and civilizational realities of the Tunisian society within the framework of an ever invigorating modernization vision.

With the establishment of the national state, the guidelines of educational reform were issued in 1958. The objectives and principles of that reform were in line with the cultural references of Independent Tunisia based on openness to the human heritage of the modern renaissance, which is exactly the reform reference adopted by the Tunisian reform movement since the nineteenth century. The Tunisian national school supplied the newly-born Tunisian state with scores of qualified people who successfully replaced the French executives working in the Tunisian civil service.

The school of independence has been a public institution. All social classes contributed to its foundation. Consequently, primary schools spread over rural backwater areas thanks to the combined efforts of both the state and generous citizens. At that time, the priority of the State of independence was to spread education and redress the colonial era situation marked by division and disparities between regions; actually all Tunisians didn't have access to education.

In short, the 1958 reform managed to establish the national identity and the requirements of the State of independence. It also contributed to training Tunisian qualified persons who took part in building the modern state and modernizing society.

However, the fast and huge scientific and technological developments of late twentieth century has made it difficult for the Tunisian school to keep pace with and meet the new challenges. In reaction to that, the authorities took some hasty and improvised decisions, which failed, despite a number of achievements, to find permanent solutions to the internal and external challenges faced by the national school.

In such a context, the reform of 1991 was meant to be comprehensive and radical to enable the national school to regain its rightful place and ensure the right of education to all through generalizing the fundamental school. However, the urgent need for developing the reality of

the Tunisian school, together with the growing challenges occasioned by the internal and external changes, has pushed for introducing a new educational reform. This latter sought to reaffirm the renewed role of the school and the necessity of making it capable of keeping pace with the changes brought about by knowledge, technology, job market, production and the requirements of globalization and their cultural, moral and ethical outcomes.

Despite the explicit ambition of this reform, the attained results fell short of the expectations. The Tunisian educational system shows evidence of decline such as the decrease in the level of graduates' acquisitions, increase of dropouts, spread of negative phenomena inside educational institutions including violence, cheating, absenteeism, and the emergence of unusual phenomena like drug and narcotic addiction at schools, which are all symptoms of a moral crisis in our schools. These problems have distracted the Tunisian school from accomplishing its educational task and contributing to development. Instead, school has become a burden on the national community as it graduates young people who can't find jobs due its failure to provide them with the skills and qualifications required by the job market.

The school of the Republic has therefore become more elitist as it allows success only for the excellent and the rich and deprives the other categories which can't assimilate abstract and theoretical knowledge. As a result, tens of thousands drop out each year (more than a hundred thousand each year in recent years). With such a numbers with no prospects and no ability to adapt with reality despite obtaining high education degrees, the crisis of both society and school is furthermore being aggravated.

The common thread of all reforms of the Tunisian educational system proves that education is closely linked to the aspirations of Tunisians and expresses their will to build a society that is firmly attached to its identity while being open to modernity and enlightenment. This dialectic relationship between originality and modernity underlies the different reforms introduced to the Tunisian school since independence. In addition to that, sustained efforts have been exerted all along to make education accessible to all social classes and restructure its components to provide promotion opportunities to poor and disadvantaged social classes.

The national public school's commitment to reform and modernization is ongoing and in line with reality and its needs and consistent with the types of challenges it is facing. As such, it can become at the lead of the forces seeking to change and develop society to attain the best of human ideals that fit our national priorities.

1.3- The systematic choice:

The best characteristic of the reform process is that it draws inspiration from the Tunisian Revolution, its democratic commitments, and the adequate working mechanisms regarding mainly participation in public affairs. Since it's no longer possible to monopolize decision making and political management, the Ministry of Education has decided to involve the broadest spectrum of educational actors and stakeholders in accordance with Tunisia' new choices.

Decision makers are deeply convinced that education is a national strategic affair which requires openness to all educational actors including educators, managers, supervisors, students and parents as well as all partners of the school and civil society organizations and associations, political parties and experts so as to build the school we want for our country and prepare our graduates to fully assume their responsibilities in life and at work. Acting together in a spirit of partnership and coordination, a broad spectrum of actors have taken part in diagnosing the educational situation and criticizing, suggesting, developing ideas and programs.

For the first time in the history of educational reforms undertaken in Tunisia, a basic systematic approach has been adopted to listen carefully to all points of view, suggestions and assessments voiced by students, civil society organizations, and the Committee on Youth, Culture, Education and Higher Education And Scientific Research at the Assembly of the Representatives of the People. No matter how different, diverse and convergent they are, they all contribute to the endeavor aiming at finding the best methods and options to build a new school capable of shaping a free citizen filled with universal principles and values and firmly attached to his/her cultural and civilizational environment.

The political will embodies the will of the whole nation to adopt dialogue as a strategic approach to ensure a really effective participation that makes of all parties real partners to the task of building future generations. As such, it reflects the Tunisian unique situation where elites of its vibrant civil society, represented by the quartet overseeing national dialogue, have succeeded through responsible consensus and dialogue to go beyond their differences and address coexistence difficulties which almost destroyed the nation. We should admit that the world's acknowledgement of the quartet's genuine efforts which saved the country from the dire consequences of discord through awarding it the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize is partly a recognition of the role of the Tunisian school which has trained those nationalist elites who have succeeded in making use of the values of reason, dialogue and co-

existence learnt in our schools and transforming them into responsible actions and commitments that bind people together instead of dividing them, and build instead of destroying.

To achieve this participatory approach, a tripartite committee was set up to lead dialogue. Its task includes initiating and organizing dialogue, preparing dialogue documents, overseeing the different activities, and extracting outcomes to be documented in participatory way in local, regional and national reports. The National Dialogue Committee is made up of the Ministry of Education, the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT, Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail), Aahd Network for Civic Culture represented by the Arab Institute for Human Rights. The Committee prepared the education chart entitled "the School of Citizenship".

The process of dialogue culminated in a national symposium that studied the outcomes of the national dialogue on reforming the educational system. The event was organized on 16-17-18 November 2015, at the International Centre for Languages and was attended by nearly 270 educational experts from different regions; some of them represented the different local, regional and central departments of the Ministry of Education; others represented the ministries concerned directly with education such as the ministry of higher education and scientific research, the ministry of vocational training and employment, the ministry of youth and the ministry of culture. Some experts represented the Tunisian General Labor Union from different regions and others represented Aahd Network and the Arab Institute for Human Rights. A number of experts from civil society and national organizations and associations attended the symposium. The team of experts also included managers, pedagogical supervisors from primary and secondary education, administrative and financial inspectors, information and orientation advisors, primary and secondary education teachers, principals, supervisors, laboratory assistants and other staff from the different educational departments.

The adopted participatory approach which involved a harmonious coalition of the ministry, civil society, educational experts inside and outside the ministry, generated great contributions documented in a "General Report" that included all the consensuses regarding the major guidelines of reform, which in themselves are the guidelines subsequently adopted by the Ministry of Education in preparing the sectorial strategic plan 2016-2020. For this reason, such practice will further be reinforced the more reform advances. The states' institutions, the ministry and its supporting parties are expected to endorse these options and implement them through providing the necessary means and regulations that may turn them into actions affecting all levels of education.

The national dialogue on reforming the educational system was a landmark in the modern history of Tunisia. It was a response to the demands of all the components of the Tunisian society to reform the Tunisian school. In addition, the adoption of a participatory approach was a pioneering experience which put on the touchstone the democratic choice that relies on the conviction that collective action is a source of creative force and that the meeting of divergent views at the dialogue table is an inexhaustible source of views and opinions.

1.4- Reform backgrounds:

1.4.1-Legal backgrounds: the Tunisian constitution and the international and regional conventions:

The reform of the educational system relies on a number of legal bases, the first of which is the Tunisian constitution which represents the cornerstone for other reforms needed for establishing a democratic society that is likely to ensure for Tunisians freedom, dignity and social justice for which they revolted against tyranny. While confirming the right to free public education, the reform includes some human values that bind different public institutions, including the Ministry of Education, which foster all the requirements of sustainable human development. Articles 39, 42, 43, 47, and 58 of the Constitution are noteworthy.

"Education shall be mandatory up to the age of sixteen years. The state guarantees the right to free public education at all levels and seeks to provide the necessary resources to achieve a high quality of education, teaching, and training. It shall also work to consolidate the Arab-Muslim identity and national belonging in the young generations, and to strengthen, promote and generalize the use of the Arabic language and openness to foreign languages, human civilizations, and disseminate the culture of human rights." (Article 39)

"The right to culture is guaranteed. The freedom of creative expression is guaranteed. The state encourages cultural creativity and supports strengthening national culture, its diversity and renewal, in such a way as to promote the values of tolerance, rejection of violence, openness to different cultures and dialogue between civilizations. The state shall protect cultural heritage and guarantees it for future generations." (Article 42)

"The state shall promote sports and shall work to provide the facilities necessary for the exercise of physical and leisure activities." (Article 43)

"Children are guaranteed the rights to dignity, health, care and education from their parents and the state. The state must provide all types of protection to all children without discrimination and in accordance with their best interest." (Article 47)

"The state shall protect persons with disabilities from all forms of discrimination. Every disabled citizen shall have the right to benefit, according to the nature of the disability, from all measures that will ensure his/her full integration into society, and the state shall take all necessary measures to achieve this". (Article 48)

These articles are fundamental bases for reform as they stipulate taking the necessary measures for achieving the aspirations of our people for high quality public school, equitable for all, where learners, despite their differences, find all that prepares them for life, employment, co-existence, and active citizenship; a school which respects their dignity, provides for their specificities and differences, develops their personalities within the framework of the Arab Islamic values as a subsidiary to the universal human values agreed by all the peoples of the world throughout their struggle to attain the "human dignity" they deserve.

Hence, the reform of the educational system seeks to promote the international and regional conventions relating to education. Part of this commitment is to make reform introduce policies ensuring an educational environment which strengthens respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms, provides for total development for the human personality and the sense of its dignity; an environment where the learner is trained on human rights and citizenship to grow up and become a citizen who actively participates in a free society. This reform must be undertaken within a national strategic approach that draws from the "United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004) n° 4" which focuses on taking such measures as:

- Integrating education of human rights in national legislations governing education at schools.
- Revise school textbooks and school programs.
- Train teachers before and after recruitment on human rights and their education methodology.
- Organizing activities outside the framework of school programs, some of them focus on schools while others focus on the family and the local community.
- Develop teaching materials.
- Set up support networks for teachers and other professionals.

The objectives of these actions are to enable the school to play its role in setting up the pillars of the nascent democratic republic which the Tunisians agreed upon.

1.4.2- Reform literature:

The Ministry of Education didn't start from the scratch when formulating its reform project. It actually acknowledges the works of precedent ministries mainly their diagnosis and assessment of the reality of the educational system. It has capitalized on those works to devise orientations, find solutions and programs likely to upgrade the performance of the school and develop it to fully assume its responsibility. In addition to the legal bases adopted to prepare its reform programs, including the 2002 School Education Directive Law, the Ministry of Education relied on very important futuristic visions included in some studies and reports.

Most important literatures are:

- The evaluation studies conducted by experts of the Ministry of Education throughout more than ten years.
- International reports prepared by international experts from the United Nations and other international organizations (UNESCO, ALECSO, UNICEF...)
- Comparative studies between the Tunisian educational system and high quality educational systems.
- The outcomes of Tunisia's participation in international assessments mainly (The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)).
- The outcomes of the joint committees of the Ministry of Education and the ministries of higher education and scientific research, and vocational training and employment.
- The studies and projects prepared by the committees of focus on strategic lines of educational reform set up during the first transition period (January 2011- November 2012).
- The studies and projects prepared during the second transition period (November 2012- June 2013), and the outcomes of the study days held at that period.

- The overall report of the national symposium on "the methodology of reforming the educational system" held in Tunis on 29-30-31 March 2012.
- The national report on education for all by 2015 released in 2014 by the National Forum on Education for All.
- The 2014 national report on education.
- The Tunisian General Labor Union's document entitled: "Reforming the educational system in Tunisia: Principles and methods" issued by the department of civil service in September 2015.
- The document of "the Chart of education and the school of citizenship" issued by Aahd Network for Civic Culture.
- "The White Book for the Reconstruction of the Educational System" issued by the Civil Coalition for Reforming the Educational System.
- The writings addressed to the ministry by other ministries, national bodies, organizations, personalities and experts.
- The overall report of the national symposium on studying the outcomes of the national dialogue held in Tunis on 16-17-18 November 2015.

In another context, the Ministry of Education held many meetings with members of parliament which successively made it easier to debate the ministry's policies and discuss the strategic guidelines of the educational reform it initiated.

Those meetings enabled the ministry's technical committees to upgrade their performances and improve their plans and programs and check their projects upon the suggestions of MPs. During the meetings, a number of proposals were made to strengthen the relationship between the People's Representatives with these committees. In this context, it was agreed to organize a "parliamentary symposium" for further studying future reform projects.

The sectorial committee followed up the process of setting up "the Sector Strategic Plan 2016-2020" in its different stages. After rich dialogues, the committee approved the plan thus enabling the Ministry of Education to present its policies and different projects relating to educational system reform which is expressed in the following fundamental nine strategic objectives of the five-year plan:

Strategic objectives:

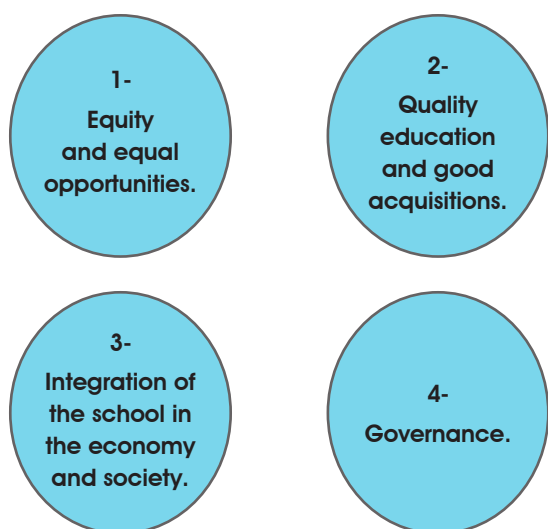
- 1 **Achieving equity and equal opportunities.**
- 2 **Revising the school mapping.**
- 3 **Upgrading human resources' skills.**
- 4 **Upgrading learners' acquisitions and improving their learning.**
- 5 **Develop school life.**
- 6 **Restructuring preparatory and secondary education.**
- 7 **Combatting school failure and drop-out.**
- 8 **Develop the use of information and communication technologies in education, teaching administration and management.**
- 9 **Strengthening principles of good governance within the educational system.**

All the aforesaid objectives and ideas and the adoption of the said rich documents helped the Ministry of Education to take in stock all the relevant and useful suggestions and charge scientific panels to explore the best practices in such a way as to develop the educational system and meet the challenges it faces.

2- CHALLENGES:

The 2002 Education Directive Law brought ambitious objectives and ideal goals. However, the educational reality has been since suffering from the pressure of the adopted policies which failed to improve the performance of the educational system because of the underlying intentions of fast political gains instead of achieving quality and its international standards.

The succession of populist policies has improved quantity indicators though to the detriment of many indicators of quality and type. The current reality of the educational system requires the reform process to address a great number of problems. To do so steadily, problems are methodologically grouped in four major challenges:



2.1- Equity and equal opportunities.

The Tunisian educational system has to a large extent succeeded in broadening the Tunisians' access to education thanks to the existence of schools all over the country as the high rate of schooling (which almost reaches 100%) shows. Nevertheless, quality indicators show great disparities and problems which may no longer be left unresolved, especially when they relate to the principles of equity and equal opportunities, which in turn are closely linked to the greater notion of justice in its absolute dimension. Equity means that each individual should get his due within the framework of the educational and social systems.

Since education in our country still represents, in the national conscience, and despite all obstacles, a major social leverage, it should be an absolute national priority. In fact, society wants school to provide equal opportunities to students to enable them to share the same values. The right to education also enables each individual to develop his/her own personality, upgrade his/her cognitive potentials and skills, integrate into social and professional life and practise his/her citizenship.

To ensure achieving those objectives, the distribution of public resources must take into account the economic and social disparities between the regions and classes and the differences between their intellectual capabilities, methods and patterns of learning and their different intelligences. Therefore, students in disadvantaged and far area schools and those who suffer from health problems need to be provided special care through personalised interventions to achieve an acceptable level of qualification for all students regardless of their differences.

However, the gap between legislations and the educational and social objectives is very wide. Though quantity indicators show positive achievements of the educational system, indicators still give evidence of the difficulties the Tunisian school face in ensuring equity and equal opportunity for all in a number of fields and levels including:

2.1.1- Preschool classes:

Coverage rate with preschool schools is only 45.6% in all primary schools. This national rate expresses a gross disparity between the regions in terms of coverage with the preschool year in primary schools.

Concerning the rate of students who benefited from a pre-school year, public or private, or from Koranic schools, the majority of internal regions with countryside characteristics have rates far under the national average in comparison with the coastal regions and Greater Tunis. The rates of the new enrolled students at the primary school first year who have benefited from pre-school education vary between 44.2% in Kasserine and 96.8% in Tunis 2.

Given the fact that national and international studies confirmed that the preschool year have an impact on the

chances of learners to pursue their studies successfully with a differential rate of 30%. The educational system cannot be equitable while receiving learners with such disparities in their aptitude and initial potentials and subsequently exposing them to the same programs regardless of the learning time needed by each category of them. And even worse, they are later on evaluated with the same evaluation system and ranked as if they started from the same line. Certainly, their chances would not be the same because those who have joined primary school without accomplishing the preschool year are more exposed to early drop out and are less likely to finish their education.

2.1.2- Teaching framework:

Since the Ministry of Education gave up vocational training, which was adopted for many years in primary education, and closed down the specialised training institutions entitled to provide basic training for would-be teachers, the ministry has been adopting diverse ways of recruitment. Employment concerns count more than the requirements of training and professionalism thus making our educational system loses one of the prerequisites of its quality.

In addition, the growing phenomenon of recruitment for social reasons after the Revolution using criteria such as the oldest in age, the oldest degree and the general legislative pardon, despite the recognition of the rights of those who were unjustly laid off and sentenced throughout decades, our educational system has found itself staffed with scores of teachers with poor basic training and inadequate university qualifications to teach in primary schools. Their language proficiency and basic training are poor and they face difficulties in adapting with the updates in the educational programs and teaching contents and in undertaking self-education and self-training to keep up with the updates in programs and teaching methodology. Furthermore, they deeply feel that the task assigned to them is very difficult. The situation became even worse with the reliance on continuous training organized by inspectors for reasons including the limited qualifications of the recruited on the one hand and on the general situation of the country which led to decreasing the opportunities for teachers to undertake training and on the other hand, leading to depriving inspectors of their pedagogical authority. Reinstating recruitment interviews hasn't solved the essential problem despite their transparency and credibility.

Likewise, resorting to temporary contracts and the growing reliance on contractors especially in recent years in some regions disliked by educators has contributed to the decline of the educational system's performance despite the laudable efforts exerted by those contractors. Consequently, regional disparities worsened and the gap between insti-

tutions in terms of performance and results widened. The transfer of teachers forced the ministry to resort to untrained teachers or to contractors. As a result, some students in those regions might finish their primary education without having the opportunity to be taught by a tenured teacher as they are taught for six years alternatively by temporary contractors.

A system functioning with these mechanisms of recruiting teachers cannot be equitable to learners and cannot be capable of ensuring their right to good education that qualifies them for success and acquisition of competencies necessary for integration in life and employment.

2.1.3- Pedagogical and psychological care for persons with special needs:

Despite the continued efforts of the Ministry of Education regarding the integration of students with special needs like the handicapped, the talented and those suffering from learning difficulties, the results are still far short of the desired level.

The failure of these efforts is probably due to considerations linked to different levels:

a- The conceptual level:

- Tradition has it that "the handicapped" mean exclusively "people with special needs" while it includes other categories like the talented and those suffering from learning difficulties whose right to education had never before been ensured by the ministry.
- The conceptual confusion between "learning difficulties" and "learning disorders" prevented every category from enjoying special care.
- Reduction of "learning disorders" to one disorder, dyslexia, out of ten different ones.

b- The legislative and organizational level:

- Lack of the human rights active approach guaranteed by legislations and binding laws.
- Lack of cooperation and coordination mechanisms between all stakeholders.
- Lack of a database which ensures accuracy of diagnosis and effectiveness of interventions and consequently absence of credibility of quantity and quality data.
- Lack of the necessary mechanisms necessary to identify the type of need and distinguish one from another like "learning disorders" and "high potentials".

- Lack of intervention during the early learning period.
- Lack of the specialized body capable of following up these cases at all different levels of education: Primary, preparatory and secondary.

c- The institutional level:

- Inadequacy of educational facilities (in terms of architecture and infrastructure) namely kindergartens and private schools.
- Scarcity of equipment and lack of digital media, tools and resources in general.
- Lack of libraries, recreational and cultural facilities which assist in the process of integration within the classrooms.
- Violation of the provisions contained in decrees and circulars requiring the organization of support and remedial sessions and activation of the pedagogical oversight for these classes.

d- The educational and pedagogical level:

- Scarcity and sometimes lack of pedagogical training for the concerned people.
- Lack of fundamental and continuous training in inclusive education and learning.
- Lack of follow-up and assessment programs adapted to the students specificities.
- Lack of program adaption to meet the differences between students.

The successful educational experiences in the world are marked by their ability to apply differential approaches that take into consideration the difference in learning methods between students, the diversity of their intelligences and their capacity to learn. Accordingly, our school today is urgently required to formulate a national plan through which our school will be transformed into an inclusive school that integrates all of its students and provides them with real opportunities for learning, growing up and training. This inclusive plan should include providing schools with good architectural plans, redesigning school facilities, training teachers, adapting curricula, benefiting from digital applications which have become affordable.

The process of inclusion should not target only persons with different disabilities. It should also target talented students whose potentials develop according to a different learning pattern and personalized tools. The school has to succeed in training teachers to satisfy the needs of these two categories, design personalized programs, and provide new requirements for our schools; it should also seriously

and deeply evaluate the option of the preparatory pilot school and pilot institutes which have not made the desired difference; it neither provided the country with elites and talents nor affected the neighboring educational institutions positively.

The challenge of today's school is to be equitable to all those categories and ensure their right to quality education in an inclusive school that fulfills the duty of ensuring the right to education to all, the aim being to safeguard the human dignity. Actually, international surveys show that the economic cost of adopting a dual educational system (ordinary schools and special education centers) is very high. Recommendations of the United Nations and UNESCO all urge countries to put an end to such exclusive systems.

2.1.4- Equipment, facilities and teaching tools:

The hard work conditions in the majority of schools are due to the poor and aging educational facilities and equipment and to the lack of the necessary teaching tools. The situation is even worse in the rural and far areas which suffer from a number of phenomena that violate the provisions relating to education including:

- School mapping is so irregular that primary schools are distributed arbitrarily in such a way as more than 50 schools for example host no more than ten students, and in some cases, no more than two.
- The decline of educational services in these schools to an extent undermining human dignity.
- Large numbers of students go to school in difficult conditions. Having to walk kilometers to and from school, they find it impossible to learn.
- The growing phenomenon of mixed-level classes and its negative effect on pedagogical performance.
- Loss of many school days because of teachers' absence due to harsh climate conditions and transportation difficulties.
- Increased dependence on contractors without professional experience in these areas.
- Lack of pro-education environment around the school.
- Impossibility of covering all schools with the Internet which deprives learners from using information and communication technologies.

All of these factors have greatly weakened rural schools' performance. Therefore, a special intervention plan must

be formulated to upgrade schools with confirmed needs and targeted areas to gradually bridge the gaps between institutions and regions and make them more respectful of the requirements of education. In addition to that, the teaching tools used are still very conventional as they lack in the necessary flexibility and don't provide for the difference of students' learning patterns, methods and needs. The Ministry of Education initially followed a policy of transparency and supplied the national public opinion with accurate information on the situation of schools. By so doing, the ministry succeeded in organizing the "School's Month" program which drew the attention of all Tunisians to the place of school in their conscience and their love to it. Joining the program, so many people, associations and economic institutions generously took part in improving school facilities and equipment.

Despite the importance of this effort, our educational institutions are in dire need of more care and maintenance to become "friendly and inclusive schools": with modern architecture, appealing environment and functional performance, and capable of fulfilling their educational duty properly.

2.1.5- The high cost of education:

The State of independence established free education and the new Tunisian constitution has reaffirmed this principle and made education free and compulsory. For decades now, however, costs of education have been increasing gradually to the extent that they have become out of reach of many Tunisian families. The fierce competition between students and the strong desire to excel to get access to "prestigious disciplines" require increasing expenses to buy extra books and pay for extra hours in most school subjects. Consequently, a new flourishing business has shattered the hope of many Tunisians to continue their studies and pushed some of them to voluntarily drop out. This situation is the result of the absence of a remedial policy. Once again, the disadvantaged and middle class Tunisians are the most exposed.

The biggest problem caused by the disparities between students, regions and classes may be the emergence of a large gap between the reality of the Tunisian school and its initial project which has so far remained theoretical mainly in the light of the weakening relationship between academic educational success and social advancement and promotion; a situation which further breaks down the relationship between the student and the school in general. In addition, this has occasioned some new phenomena like violence and cheating inside schools and other dangerous practices. Also, the failure of the educational system to keep up with the fast and successive changes

occurring all over the world in general and in Tunisia in particular has contributed to students' abhorrence of school classes. This, together with other economic and social factors, have allowed for the persistence of school failure and early drop-out or the continuation of schooling without acquiring the skills needed for learning and for life-long development.

2.2- The quality of education and good acquisitions:

The quality of education is at the heart of the major challenges being faced by the Tunisian society at this transitional period. Some of the symptoms of the failure of the educational system are:

- A large number of new students lack in the basic competencies necessary for successfully continuing their studies in higher education.
- Increased rates of repetition at the university.
- High unemployment rates among graduates which are partially due to the poor quality of education, namely school education, thus badly affecting their chances of success in higher, technical and vocational education.

Improving and developing students' acquisitions should be the biggest concern of the new educational reform in order to enable them to actively take part in life's different activities. The outcomes of the national assessment surveys and the results of Tunisia's participation in international students' assessment programs enable us to make a diagnosis of the current situation of students' learning.

Quality data related to analyzing the evaluation of students' acquisitions makes improving these acquisitions the greatest challenge of the new reform for the following reasons:

- Quality education is a strong bulwark against unemployment of graduates and immunity against different forms of radicalism.
- Giving special attention to the quality of education in response to the diverse challenges we face today is a must.
- Winning the battle of quantity would not be fruitful if the training of human resources is such poor.
- Without high quality preschool and school education undertaken by qualified teachers who are paid good salaries, a credible system for assessing curricula and actual acquisitions of learners, continued discipline in training, appointing, and promoting teachers, Tunisia would not be able to meet the challenges it faces.

- Promoting quality education does not only require up-grading and maintaining educational infrastructures, but also improving educational conditions, increase matching the educational system to the real needs of the economy and society and upgrade the quality of curricula and teaching methodology.

2.3- Integration into the economy and society:

The failure of the current educational system is not manifest only in its bad management of the school failure and early dropout, but also in the graduates themselves. The basic indicator of this failure is the graduates' unemployment rate which in the third quarter of 2015 reached 30% of the unemployed nationwide, i.e. 212400 according to the National Statistics Institute.

Part of those obstacles preventing the integration of today's graduates of educational and vocational institutions in general in the job market and active life is that recruitment systems in the world now favor qualifications and direct professional skills over the obtained scientific or professional degree and the regular updating and assessment of the academic knowledge throughout the professional career for all workers. Thus, the school should address positively these new objective constraints generated by the fast technological developments and deep transformations affecting the development of new professions and references of skills and qualifications.

Training young people to actively integrate into the job market and in social life in general through two major leverages which to a large extent determine the role of the educational system in national sustainable development to free the future of our nation from options which will not serve its interests:

First: Considering the school as the principal breeding ground that prepares the majority of schools regardless of their capacities and social backgrounds to acquire the tools of integration in life and job market. Therefore, there is an urgent need for converging all revisions, reforms and potentials to serve that ideal objective through designing adequate school programs, giving much more attention to the practical and professional sides, familiarizing students as early as possible and gradually with the world of trades to make them benefit from its experimental and practical dimensions, and finding the best ways for truly opening the school to the economic institutions, industrial and production units within the framework of a comprehensive vision that takes into account the decisive link between education and its outcomes. This entails the need to stop considering vocational training the option

of those who fail at school and pass to the young and their families a new culture that values vocational training instead of underestimating it.

Nevertheless, it should be admitted that the dominant developmental pattern in Tunisia now and the nature of the economic, industrial and service fabric are not that developed to allow for effectively matching the theoretical acquisitions learnt by students at school with the economic realities and production fields outside it. Thus, the state's policy to design a new economic pattern that lays the foundations for a real economic development especially in the internal regions should be in line with the desire to increase the ability of students to integrate in life and in the job market in such a way as to create real opportunities to train them on the gradual integration in the world of trades and the society of knowledge.

Second: Strengthening the relationship between the different components of the national training and educational systems including school education, higher education and vocational training and setting up bridges between them within the framework of a comprehensive approach that enables each component to ensure students' integration in such a way as to strengthen complementarity and interrelationship and fight dropout and school failure. The comprehensive dimension that should characterize educational reform stems from the fact that the school qualifies young people not only to obtain the General Secondary Education Certificate (GSEC) and join university, but also to benefit from the different vocational training offers provided by several and diverse sectors namely in the light of the fragmentation of institutions, mechanisms and programs which are supposed to function within a unified national vision to achieve the objectives of integrating and qualifying students and easing the conditions for getting real life and job opportunities after school for all.

2.4- Governance:

The national expenditure on each student per year in primary school has increased five times in the last two decades from 280 dinars in 1995 to nearly 1300 dinars in 2015. Likewise, the preparatory and secondary education expenditure increased with the same rate from 475 dinars in 1995 to nearly 2400 dinars in 2015. However the increase in expenditure has not yielded any improvement whatsoever in the results of the educational system as the number of dropouts remained over 100 thousand every year and the rates of success in GSEC exams have stood under 60%. In addition, Tunisia ranking in international assessments has not improved and the overall level of graduates continued its decline thus affecting their ability to continue their studies or find jobs.

The soaring expenditure and the deterioration of results clearly indicate the existence of governance problems which have caused dissipation of resources earmarked for the system. This situation urges us to drastically reconsider mechanisms and methods of making policies, and taking, implementing, following up and evaluating decisions in such a way as to strengthen and uphold principles of transparency and the right of access to information, apply a real participatory approach according to a good distribution of roles and responsibilities, firmly establish the principles of accountability and the supremacy of law, and ensure the quality of legislations and regulations governing the educational system.

At the level of administrative organization, the last decades have witnessed the creation of several general and specialized administrations, services and centers for the Ministry of Education. Consequently administrative bureaucracy has increased thus undermining the ministry's abilities to innovate and the effectiveness of planning, implementing and evaluating. This phenomenon has also led to the interference of tasks and confusion in their distribution; in addition to fragmenting a number of strategic projects such the project of integrating information and communication technologies in the educational system and the project

of continuous training and human resources development and submitting them to a number of stakeholders at the central and regional levels. Despite the funds allocated to them, a number of projects were fruitless. Worsening rates of dropout has made the Tunisian school miss a number of opportunities.

From this perspective, the restructuring of the Ministry of Education on the basis of functional specialization seems to be an urgent necessity so as to clearly and practically establish relationships between the different structures and carry out reform with the required efficiency and effectiveness. In this way, we can address the different forms of school wastage which have been the main cause of past reforms' failure. Despite their positive points, those reforms failed to make of the Tunisian school better than what it is today.

Moreover, educational reform should translate the national options expressed in the constitution and provide for adaptation with the requirements of structural reforms related to the territorial and administrative division at all levels: local, regional, provincial and national. Also, the adoption of decentralization and depolarization poses new challenges to the educational system which are likely to affect its organization.

3- STRATEGIC ORIENTATIONS OF REFORM:

3.1- Vision and general principles:

According to the outcomes of the different stages of the national dialogue on reform of the educational system, education in our country is founded on a number of strategic general principles functioning as pillars supporting

the different aspects of reform and as nursery for all the revisions which the Tunisian school is expected to undergo in the following years. Those revisions are summarized by the national dialogue on education in the following major principles:

- 1 Education is a national priority and is the responsibility of the state.
- 2 Education is public and free in all its levels including preschool education.
- 3 All children have the right to preschool education.
- 4 Education is compulsory till the age of sixteen.
- 5 A unified high quality education that cares for the personal needs and specificities.
- 6 An education that respects the inherent dignity of the learner.
- 7 Education is in the service of sustainable development.
- 8 Neutrality of the educational institution.

These general principles, which were adopted by the different parties, need the following precisions:

First: Considering education a national priority, among others, which rank high among the concerns of the state.

Acknowledging the strategic role played by education as a major leverage of economic growth, and considering that education is directly responsible for educating millions of children, providing them with the basic skills and immu-

nizing them against all forms of delinquency and exclusion, the national community firmly believes that education should be a national priority which the state should fully take in charge through providing all the necessary resources and capabilities to implement its plans and allow for their success.

Therefore, considering education a national priority involves providing more resources to the sector of education to halt the degradation of its infrastructures and help in making schools friendly spaces and appealing to students. In addition, recruiting specialized staff would bring an added

value to the sector through providing for the psychological states of students, integrate those with special needs and provide the necessary means for achieving that. Nonetheless, and within the framework of the new policy of local governance, the contribution of the state, and namely its educational expenditure, is not opposed to the necessity of giving much more freedom to the schools at the regional and local levels to manage their affairs so that it can be possible to benefit from partnership opportunities made available by the economic, industrial and service sectors to strengthen the capabilities of the school.

Second: Education is public and free at all its levels including preschool education.

The reform of the educational system today is being carried out within the framework of strengthening a number of historical principles on which the modern Tunisian school has been built after independence, namely ensuring a free public education at all its levels including preschool education which should be generalized on all regions. Preschool education should be a level making part of the student's school career because it enables him/her to acquire at an early age initial aptitudes necessary for the rest of the school career. In this regard, the World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education held in Moscow in 2010 affirms that "education and early childhood care" "is part of the right to education and the main foundation for holistic human development".

This option which involves the state's responsibility to ensure free public education stems from considering the education a strategic service that ranks high among the concerns of the state, produces knowledge and prepares citizens filled with the values of citizenship and nationalism.

Third: Education is compulsory till the age of sixteen.

Within the framework of ensuring an educational democracy and equal opportunities for all Tunisians, curbing dropout and strengthening school children till they attain a certain age, the school also seeks to ensure compulsory education till the age of sixteen in such a way as to prevent school from coercively retaining students who no more have the motivation to continue studying, and lay bridges and pathways to integrate students experiencing learning, psychological and social difficulties in other training disciplines or in active life. The urgent national plans and policies should be made to neutralize the social and economic factors which prevent an important segment of Tunisian families from making their children finish their studies though they have the will to and awareness about the role of education in social promotion.

Fourth: A unified high quality education that cares for the personal needs and specificities.

Modern school's efficiency in today's world is measured by its ability to ensure an education with high degree of performance quality in terms of both learners' acquisitions and educators' training as well as in terms of serving the overall objectives of development. Performance quality does not only reside in the ability of the Tunisian school and the national system of developing human resources in general to reach the same levels of countries with high quality educational and training performance, but also in its ability to adapt with the local reality and its constraints to produce generations of students with high and flexible skills and competition capabilities that enable them to position themselves within a globalized employment reality and overcome the conditions of integration into an active life that is getting more complicated day after day.

Furthermore, successful educational experiences also involve the ability of the school to go beyond the holistic patterns and adopt instead differential approaches which take into consideration the difference of learning patterns and the diversity of individuals' needs, and satisfy the various expectations of society regarding the student and the country people dream of.

An advantage of differential education is that it is student-focused. As such, it urges the school with all its components to adapt with the diverse characteristics of the new comers and not the opposite, as was the case before the emergence of the educational approaches founded on the "right of all to a quality education" and on the "aptitude of all children to learn" and other human principles which have imposed themselves in this field.

It should also be confirmed that the student, regardless of his age category, is a human being. So, the school and its staff should protect his/her dignity and specificity, and provide for his/her well-being and balance, and address the obstacles of its growth. This entails ensuring the rights of learners to total development of their personalities, respecting their different intelligences and protecting them from all forms of segregation regardless of its form and motivation, be it gender, race, religion or culture.

Five: Education in the service of sustainable education

One of the duties of the school is that it develops the individual, strengthens his/her capabilities and qualifies him/her to become a balanced citizen who is reconciled with himself and his environment. It also plays the decisive role of supplying the economic cycle with generations of students capable of integrating into the society of

knowledge thanks to their up-to-date training and skills in such a way as to make of Tunisia a developed country capable of producing knowledge, protecting its potentials and resources, and providing good living conditions and adequate employment opportunities for all its citizens.

The development of human resources, to which education contributes, aims at enriching the course of multifaceted development in the country to contribute to bridging the gap which separates from Tunisia from developing countries and actively participate in creating wealth and achieving the intended objectives. Today, this possibility could happen with the reliance of a large portion of the world's economy on a new type of knowledge that is shared by all people: digitalized information and various applications of information and communication technologies.

Six: Neutrality of the educational institution.

Despite the impossibility of standing neutral towards the phenomena of ignorance, illiteracy, huge social disparities, and its involvement in combatting causes of underdevelopment, the school is required to avoid any action which may favor the policies of other parties to the detriment of others' or any manipulation that may be undertaken by any educational staff to serve narrow class objectives.

The principle of neutrality of the educational system is directly linked to the equality of all people before the law and the obligatory respect of public interest. It's the political neutrality that bolsters the supremacy of education over party conflicts and competition, distances school from conflicts of religious differences, sects and doctrines. It's also the commercial neutrality that bans involving educational spaces in profit calculations of economic institutions and forbids the use of personal information for marketing and commercial purposes. However, this neutrality should not forbid some forms of partnership with private or public institutions whenever there appears a confirmed pedagogical or educational benefit for students. Yet, a number of precautions and preventive measures should be taken.

The neutrality of the Tunisian school would be meaningless when it comes to playing its role in fighting terrorism. Combatting terrorism and the different forms extremism and fanaticism has become an urgent national affair especially with recurrent terrorist acts in the country which have reached an alarming level lately. The public opinion knows about the operations targeting recruiting educated young people and using them to serve non-national purposes likely to threaten educational institutions, undermine the foundations of the republic and change Tunisians' lifestyle by force. Those terrorist acts and recruitment

operations have all taken place in a climate fraught with accusations of unbelief and tendencies, fanaticism and isolationism in order to divide the country and undermine its unity.

With the surge of some unusual and strange phenomena in the modern history of Tunisia and on the educational stage, the school's support for the military and security's generous efforts has become urgently required. This entails the protection of all the components of educational institutions against the dangers of extremism, isolationism and adhering to terrorist currents which are against the Tunisians' traditions of moderation, mediation, accepting and coexisting with the other, and against Tunisians' different other values which have shaped throughout history their common personality.

Furthermore, the situation requires enabling educational institutions to step up vigilance in this critical period of our history to be capable of meeting the challenges we face and assume their responsibility of spreading enlightened thought which abounds in our Arab and Islamic heritage, promoting learners' sense of belonging to their country and their desire to protect it and contribute to its development and advancement.

The national community has a growing awareness of the value of the school's role at this special moment and of its ability to become an active actor in satisfying the needs of the Tunisian society which is founded on the values of tolerance, mediation and moderation and contributing to the protection of our republican system. Based on a constitution that won national consensus and the admiration of the international community, this constitution qualifies our specificities to join the peoples of the world to achieve human ideals and world peace through:

- Protecting educational institutions against all risks of terrorism and extremism through taking intellectual, cultural and educational actions against this phenomenon.
- Undertaking interaction between educational institutions and their civil and social surroundings to ensure joint action against this phenomenon.
- Promoting the sense of belonging to Tunisia and strengthen the awareness about the achievements of the republic and about the state's place in society's life.
- Continued vigilance and on-time dealing with the different unusual phenomena.
- Providing our youth with the sufficient immunization to protect them against their recruitment to conduct extremist and fanatic activities.
- Combatting all forms of violence.

3.2- The duty of the school:

1	Respecting and protecting the holistic aspect of children's rights.
2	Equitable school that provides equal opportunities for all learners without discrimination.
3	Prepares young people to life and work: education and training.
4	Seeks comprehensive development of the human personality.
5	Educates the young on the principles of human rights and values of citizenship.
6	Ensures the personalization of education and learning and provides for the special needs of learners.
7	Strengthens the feeling of pride and sense of belonging to the school in the learner's conscience.
8	Establishes safe communication inside the school and provides an appealing educational space.
9	Provides basic accompaniment services: health, psychological, social, cultural ...
10	Provides necessary support services: Transportation, catering, accommodation ...
11	Open to and interacting with its environment.
12	Provides highly qualified and skilled human resources.

3.2.1- The image of the school in reform:

The embodiment of the principles guiding educational reform under the expectations of the national community requires formulating a new vision for the Tunisian school that encompasses all its components including, spaces, facilities, human resources, pedagogical contents, teaching methods and tools, etc. which contribute to conducting the intended reform.

The school envisioned and promised by the new reform is a school for which providing "high quality education which cares for the individual's personal characteristics and needs" is possible and affordable. The school we want is one that is capable of ensuring strong basic training for all

learners and caring for their personal learning differences so as to give each learner a true opportunity for developing his/her acquisitions and upgrading his/her capabilities regardless of his/her learning pattern and pace.

To implement this vision, there should be sufficient highly qualified human resources convinced with the duty of the school, the rights of children, human rights in general, and the ability of every learner to upgrade his/her acquisitions and skills whenever possible.

The school that respects the specificities, tendencies and needs of each individual is the one that embodies the principle, value and ambition of equity. It is a school where the learner can practice his right to learn, develop

his/her talents and broaden his/her cognitive horizons to join life with full enthusiasm, ambition and self-confidence.

The uniform collective education of today's school has exhausted large segments of learners who can't keep up with the collective learning pattern and consequently can't find in classrooms anything that can satisfy their personal needs. This situation requires us today to revise the functions of the school and its duties so as to give every learner a chance regardless of his initial aptitudes and intellectual capabilities, and sensorimotor abilities. It's high time for school to put an end to stereotyping, lethargy and worshipping ready-made models. It should also adopt much more flexibility, adapt with the learners and their needs, specificities and patterns, and also with society and its changing realities. In addition, it should become a space that breeds learner's experiences with knowledge and life. We have to establish a school that represents for every learner a natural place for growth, development and acquisition of skills and qualifications to get the best chances for success in its comprehensive dimension.

Therefore, the school intended by the new reform is not only a space for learning and developing knowledge and acquisitions, but also a public service that provides to its beneficiaries, no matter how low is their social and cultural level, services enabling them to continue studying within conditions that facilitate integration. Catering and school transportation are no longer in our new school conception supplements of the educational activity, but rather essential services which make the public school equitable and capable of embracing all social classes, namely the disadvantaged ones, in suitable conditions for learning where disparities are reduced and chances for integration in the process of learning are increased.

Today, providing the necessary supporting services is at the heart of the school's social duty. Success in this task depends on large popular and social participation in supporting public school to fulfill its duty of cultivating youth, enlightening intellects and upholding the values agreed upon by all Tunisians. These are the challenges which require additional sacrifices from the national community to enable school to provide for any person at school age not only a seat to learn, but also suitable and comfortable conditions for learning including balanced nutrition and school transportation that makes school accessible to all even to those who live far from schools.

By including this element in this new educational reform, despite its huge financial cost, the reform becomes very consistent with its reality and aware of its challenges. In fact, improving and developing learning starts outside the classroom through ensuring the basic suitable and comfortable conditions for learning.

To achieve this ambition, a number of conditions should be created, most important of which are identifying the students deserving to benefit from the free basic school services and setting up benefiting mechanisms, openness of school to its economic and social surroundings to benefit from their potentials. With contributions that vary according to family revenues and its financial and economic resources, the school can provide services which may serve all students.

The survey conducted by the World Food Program in cooperation with the Ministry of Education in Tunis in 2014 concludes that setting up a system of balanced and efficient school catering may encourage families (especially disadvantaged ones) to keep their children at school as long as possible. It is a factor that helps combatting school dropout particularly in rural areas. In addition, it may strengthen the development of students' cognitive capabilities and improve the level of their school acquisitions through improving their growth with balanced food which might not be available at their families.

3.2.2- Functions and missions of school within the new reform:

Despite the fact that school functions renew according to the renewed social needs and priorities, and despite the diversity of knowledge sources, school remains the essential tool to vehicle to the new generations the values of the Tunisian society through an education that makes youth firmly attached to their homeland, ensure to them their balance and enable them to interact with their larger civilizational and cultural environment so as to spread human ideals in their society and upgrade the human personality.

The educational role which school must assume should evolve with the development of challenges posed to upholding human values. In this regard, society should assign school the task of inculcating those values into young people. Actually, it is a role that school should continue assuming efficiently and at the same time combatting all social illnesses resulting from the decline of the school's performance and mechanisms and from its failure to reckon with other external influences.

Despite the diversity of knowledge sources made available by the technological revolution, the place of school in spreading knowledge and science is still a crucial one. Yet, the school's function should evolve towards a qualifying one that goes beyond instilling information to developing skills and qualifications to provide young people with tools enabling them to adapt with the economic changes and continue lifelong studying. This new function is in line with the requirements of the technological era and

digital world which has made access to information as possible as never before. The school's enabling its students to conduct lifelong learning is likely to provide them with opportunities of self-training which allow for adaptation with the job market and its requirements. Therefore, this new role of the school should involve choosing the types of activities and methods which make the objective of education not the accumulation of knowledge per se, despite its importance, but focusing on developing the course of acquiring skills which give students a large margin for trial and error, experimentation and autonomous and responsible research; which are all essential stages that allow the learner to benefit from the course of building up knowledge and its methodology, and use it in his/her professional life to succeed in an ever changing and complicating world.

3.2.3- The objective conditions for undertaking these functions:

Ensuring these functions by the school requires some conditions without which school efficiency would not happen. The most important of them are:

- The availability of highly professional staff, including management, teaching and supervision staff. Without such staff, the school can't properly assume the functions assigned to it by society regardless of the nature of programs and plans and of the value of equipment available at school. Therefore, the new reform's urgent priority is to introduce deep changes to the methods of recruiting and training staff to ensure a high level of professionalism for all educational staff namely for teaching and management staff.
- Focusing educational action on the comprehensive development of the individual's personality without being limited to the cognitive development. The emotional and sensorimotor dimensions are fundamental to making a balanced personality capable of adapting with its environment and resisting different forms of influence and manipulation.
- The new role also requires that the culture of citizenship and human rights should be a common denominator and firm belief among all educational actors. The school's adoption of the culture of human rights and citizenship and its endeavor to introduce them in curricula, educa-

tional practices and in all aspects of school life is likely to protect it against the dangers threatening it and also protect society against threats and deviations.

- The establishment of a healthy and clean school environment is a fundamental prerequisite for the school's ability to carry out the functions it was set up for. The healthy school environment cannot become reality without good and smooth communication between the different parties acting inside the school to develop their joint project.
- Developing school life: School life is not only an extension of the acquisitions the student learns in the classroom, but also the basis of social upbringing and a multidimensional space (spatial, temporal, cultural, living and relational dimensions) where the individual is trained on the values of citizenship and democracy through his/her contributions and initiatives during his/her course of study or during school life. To attain these objectives, the current laws governing school life and its hierarchical organization need to be revised. The disciplinary scheme should be reformed in such a way as to appear less punishment-oriented which involves rights deprivation and dignity undermining. School time should also be revised so as to strike a balance between the teaching/learning side and the cultural, entertainment and service side through better organization of its weekly and daily paces. It has also become necessary to revise the composition of the educational council (to involve the representation of school stakeholders including the student) and shift from the internal regulations to the notion of coexistence and educational contract which is being prepared and discussed in a participatory manner to facilitate for the educator to perceive and abide by it. While school time should be revised in such a way as to tie rights to duties, it's suitable today to consider setting up a national center for developing school life.

The fulfillment of the above-mentioned conditions is likely to make learners feel proud to belong to their school and be happy to live in it. Thus they can transform it into an appealing place that preserves their dignity, respects their individual personalities, develops their talents through activities that bolster their human character and inculcate in them ideals of the right, justice, beauty, citizenship and coexistence.

3.3- Characteristics of the graduate:

1	Firmly established in his/her Arab Islamic identity and open to the universal values.
2	Emancipated citizen filled with the principles and values contained in the constitution.
3	Initiative taker, active and creative.
4	Capable of assuming his/her responsibilities in life and work.
5	Has a balanced personality in its cognitive, emotional and moral dimensions.
6	Has the qualifications of the twenty-first century and living skills.
7	Able to communicate positively with his/her environment.

In order to gage the success of the educational system in preparing its graduates to efficiently continue their professional or academic studies or their lifelong learning, and qualifying them to consciously integrate into their social, economic, civilizational and human environment, the school should attach more attention to its curricula, activities, regulations, the educational courses it offers to students, and the relationships it sets up between educational actors within it to provide the learners with balanced personality-building qualifications which successfully set a balance between the subjective and the collective and between the special and the universal.

The learner the educational system intends to make should:

- Be firmly attached to his/her Arab Islamic identity and open to universal values. Tunisia's characteristic throughout its history is that it has been the land of openness and the crossroad of civilizations which has never been closed or isolated throughout its rich and long history. It has, through mutual influence, shared the world its great achievements. Nevertheless, it has marked the personality of its citizens with the strong belonging to the glorious Arab and Islamic culture and its values of mediation, moderation, sound interpretation of sacred texts and acceptance of the new. Therefore, the school should further inculcate this original characteristic in its graduates to make them feel proud of their country and of their belonging to the Arab Islamic civilization while being open to the world and sharing humanity its universal values with self-confidence and without moral degradation.
- Be an emancipated citizen filled with the principles and ideals contained in the constitution. Since the new Tunisian constitution contains the best possible principles adopted by the national community which are likely to serve as a basis for building a free and strong nation and an active and responsible citizen, the school should vehicle those constitutional ideals to learners through its curricula and activities to make them common values learnt and observed by all generations of Tunisian citizens.
- Be an initiative-taker, active and creative. The school should endeavor to teach its students the principles of positive thinking, motivation, perseverance, independence, critical and creative thinking, the ability to solve problems and planning, good behavior, the sense of initiative, responsibility and leadership. By doing so, the school could become a fertile soil for innovation and life.
- Be capable of assuming his/her responsibilities in life and work. For so long school has limited its role to teaching and providing knowledge. Now, as the expectations from school are higher, and as it is expected to prepare young people for success in life in general, the school should focus on developing the practical and relational

skills of learners in such a way as to enable them to assume their own responsibilities and those of others and take the appropriate decisions in relation to their social and study course.

- Have a balanced personality in its cognitive, emotional and moral dimensions. The school endeavors to make the knowledge and skills acquired at school elements for building learners' self-confidence. Learners, driven by ideal values, can thus develop a balanced personality and become actively integrated in their environment.
- Have the qualifications of the twenty first century. The graduates of the Tunisian school are expected to have the skills of learning, self-learning, active learning, and life-long learning, and the ability to look for, obtain, evaluate and use information. They should also have the social qualifications which focus on having the skills necessary for coexistence, flexibility, adaptability and active civic life, communication skills including the ability to speak more than one language, active listening,

good knowledge of communication strategies and their use according to context; and the professional skills which include belief in the value of work, the principle of quality and excellence, efficiency, effectiveness and fidelity, and the ability to participate in collective work.

- Able to communicate positively with his/her environment. Communication includes acquiring the competencies of social interaction and of using digital technologies. The graduate should be able to develop his own technical skills to use those technologies to learn and communicate with the other while being aware of digital security measures and the internet ethics and rules.

To ensure providing these competencies to the learner, the educational reform relies on a number of mechanisms which include in particular revising school curricula, the official program and the pedagogical methods. Non-formal and social education patterns should also be intensively used. It also adopts some criteria and evaluation tools which suit the nature of these competencies.

