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## PRESS RELEASE

### **USAID HOSTS FORUM WITH MIDDLE EASTERN-AMERICAN LEADERS**

**WASHINGTON, DC** – Today, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the U.S. Department of State announced that officials of Middle Eastern descent are gathering for a Leadership Assembly to discuss key objectives for the broader Middle East and North Africa region.

The third in a series of events, the Leadership Assembly is hosted by USAID's Office of Public Diplomacy for Middle Eastern Partnership Initiative (MEPI) Affairs, and includes a mix of national, state and local representatives, as well as officials from the White House, State Department and USAID.

"Middle Eastern-Americans have been an integral part of American life for generations, and this Leadership Assembly represents some of the best and brightest thinkers in the public policy process," said Walid Maalouf, Director of USAID's Office of Public Diplomacy & MEPI Affairs. "Gathering this distinguished group of Middle Eastern-Americans delivers a fresh exchange of important dialogue on some of today's most pressing issues. At the same time, this meeting reflects the uniqueness of the United States."

Jim Kunder, USAID's Assistant Administrator for the Bureau of Asia and the Near East, will brief participants on USAID's activities in the broader Middle East and North Africa. In the afternoon, the Leadership Assembly will discuss more in-depth policy issues at the State Department. Prominent Middle Eastern-Americans are in attendance, including Sen. John Sununu (R-NH); Rep. Nick Rahall (D-WV); U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Deputy Secretary Alex Azar; and Spencer Abraham, former Secretary of the U.S. Department of Energy.

Now in its second year of operation, USAID's MEPI office, in addition to organizing policy discussions, travels throughout the country explaining U.S. public diplomacy initiatives in the Middle East. In March 2006, the office conducted presentations at several special events in Southern California – addressing the Council on American Islamic Relations, the Assyrian American Association of Southern California, the International Conference for the Lebanese Student of the World, as well as holding discussions with members of the Egyptian American community.

Launched in October 2004, USAID's MEPI program falls under the Bush Administration's Middle East Partnership Initiative, calling for change in the Middle East. Funded with bipartisan support from the U.S. Congress, MEPI has brought the resources, experience, and determination of the United States to bear in an effort to bolster the reform movement in the Middle East. To learn more about USAID's Middle Eastern public diplomacy efforts, visit [http://www.usaid.gov/about\\_usaid/presidential\\_initiative/diplomacy/](http://www.usaid.gov/about_usaid/presidential_initiative/diplomacy/)

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