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UN Alliance of Civilizations' Arab Fellows in US and Europe to improve trust between Arab world and West

Emerging leaders from the Middle East to experience US during election.

New York, 5 November 2012 - Twelve young leaders from North Africa and the Middle East are arriving in New York this Monday with the aim of creating new alliances and gaining knowledge and understanding of the United States and Europe. From New York, these twelve young leaders will travel across the United States and then head to Europe, landing first in Paris. Every single day of the programme will be rich in learning and in exchanges. The UNAOC's Fellowship Programme focuses on creating opportunities for young leaders, across the Arab world and the West, to increase mutual understanding through experiential learning and direct interaction with civil society. The trip takes place in the aftermath of the Benghazi crisis, demonstrating that the need is greater than ever for increased dialogue and exchange between the Western and Muslim worlds.

Organized by the Alliance, the two-week programme is funded by the German Foreign Office with the support of the Guerrand-Hermes Foundation for Peace and developed in partnership with the League of Arab States, ISESCO, the Institute of International Education, the Government of Jordan, OIC and the Qatar Committee for the Alliance of Civilizations. The Fellowship Programme is the first and only young leaders exchange programme developed jointly with partners and resources from the Arab and Muslim world, Europe, and the United States.

During its first stop in New York, the group will meet with the United Nations, spend election night at NYU and volunteer with The Bowery Mission post Hurricane Sandy. The group will also visit national and community-level service sites such as the Bronx transformation project in New York and the National Women's Law Center in Washington, DC. Another activity in Washington will be a meeting with the US State Department.

From there, the group will fly to Europe where fellows will meet with the Federal Foreign Office of Germany, NATO, as well as a pioneering meeting with Charb, a Director at Charlie Hebdo, a French satirical magazine. They will also visit the French suburbs of Bobigny (93). Along the way, the group will interact with the alumni fellows from the 2012 class (Spring and Fall) of the Fellowship Programme who are currently living in New York, Washington, Paris and Brussels.

“Our objective is to create an opportunity for these emerging leaders to see the reality of diverse societies, to deconstruct stereotypes, and to become the messengers of new relations between the western and the Muslim world,” says Jean-Christophe Bas, UNAOC Senior Advisor. The 12 fellows, selected among hundreds of applicants, include:

Sondos Asem (Egypt) is the editor-in-chief of the Muslim Brotherhood's official English-language website Ikhwanweb.com and a member of the Foreign Relations team of the Freedom and Justice Party. After The Egyptian January 25 revolution, she launched the Muslim Brotherhood's interactive social media platform @Ikhwanweb on Twitter. Ms. Asem was an active participant in the Egyptian revolution that overthrew the country's longtime dictator Hosni Mubarak in January 25, 2011,

Mbarka Bouaida is a member of the National Council of the political party “National Rally for Independents” (RNI), which forms the first party in the Opposition against the current Government led by the Islamists. Member of Parliament from 2007 to 2011, Mbarka was elected as a Chair of the Committee of Foreign Affairs in the Moroccan House of Representatives.

Last month, on the Western leg of the Fellowship Programme, twelve young leaders from North America and Europe travelled to Morocco,

Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates to meet with government, civil society and other groups.

You can follow them in this trip by reading stories and checking out photos on our fellowship blog and on our Facebook page!

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