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Date: April 14, 2008, Rabat, Morocco

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United States Ambassador to Morocco, Thomas Riley, Visits High Atlas Foundation Fruit Tree Agriculture Project and Encourages Ongoing Collaboration between Morocco and the United States

On April 10th 2008, United States Ambassador to Morocco, Thomas Riley, visited a High Atlas Foundation fruit tree agriculture project outside of Marrakech that was supported by the Ambassador's Empowerment Fund of the United States Embassy in 2005. The project planted 7,000 fruit trees to advance the socio-economic and environmental conditions of villages in the Province of Al Haouz.

Ambassador Riley, joined representatives from the High Atlas Foundation and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to visit a fruit tree agriculture project supported in 2005 by the United States Embassy in Rabat. The project of 7,000 fruit trees (cherry, apple, prune, and peach) was implemented by the High Atlas Foundation in partnership with Marrakech21 Foundation and the Regional Direction of Waters and Forests, with villages in the rural commune of Ouirgane in the Province of Al Haouz, which neighbors Toubkal National Park. Joining Ambassador Riley was the Governor of the Province of Al Haouz, Mr. Bouchaib El Moutaouakil, as well as elected officials, representatives from the Regional Division of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Regional Direction of Waters and Forests, and members of the Tororde Association.

During the visit, Ambassador Riley and Governor El Moutaouakil discussed rural development activities in the region, and toured the new Provincial Space for Development Associations of Al Haouz, a central convening space for the province's more than 1,200 rural associations, funded by Morocco's National Initiative for Human Development (INDH). Ambassador Riley and Governor El Moutaouakil then visited the village of Tororde, where they visited two fruit tree orchards funded by the 2005 project to discuss the benefits and challenges of fruit tree agriculture with members of the Tororde Association and local farmers.

The socio-economic benefits of fruit tree agriculture projects include increasing household incomes, furthering the technical skills of rural farmers, encouraging participatory democratic processes at the local level, and building diverse partnerships through the process of collaboratively designing and implementing projects. Environmental benefits include the prevention of soil erosion and desertification, the creation of new agricultural terraces, and offsetting carbon emissions. Since 2003, the High Atlas Foundation has planted over 140,000 fruit trees in Morocco, benefiting 23,000 rural people in six provinces. In June 2006, the organization launched a special campaign to plant one million fruit trees with rural Moroccan communities.

Ambassador Riley thanked the community of Tororde for their hospitality and spoke of the long-standing friendship and collaboration that exists between Morocco and the United States, saying, "Our two countries have been friends for many years and we look forward to continuing to work together for the benefit of the rural Moroccan people." He cited numerous projects supported in the region by the High Atlas Foundation, USAID, the Peace Corps, and the United States Embassy in Rabat, and his hope for continued partnerships in the years ahead. In addition, the Province of Al Haouz has been chosen as one of the sites to receive funding from Morocco's Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) for fruit tree agriculture projects. The MCC seeks to reduce poverty,

generate employment, and increase economic growth in Morocco. It is investing over \$300 million in fruit tree agriculture in Morocco as part of a five-year \$697.5 million compact that was signed in August 2007.

The High Atlas Foundation is a nonprofit organization that works to establish development projects in rural communities of Morocco that local people design and manage, and which are in partnership with government and non-government agencies. It was founded by former Peace Corps Volunteers as a way to use their experience and knowledge gained for the continued benefit of the Moroccan people. The High Atlas Foundation currently supports projects in the areas of fruit tree agriculture, potable water, irrigation, participatory training, women's cooperatives, and youth development.

For more information please visit: www.hihatlasfoundation.org.

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