

FOREIGN SERVICE INSTITUTE

February 23, 1971

Mr. Sumner Gerard, Director
U.S. Agency for International Development
Tunis, Tunisia

Dear Mr. Gerard:

I passed through Tunis about two weeks ago and called your office, but you and your deputy were both away at the moment. I talked briefly with some of the staff, and particularly with some local employees whom I used to know during my tour as Deputy Director of the Mission in 1965-66. The locals called to my attention their anxieties regarding their future employment, and I am passing some of this along, hoping that you will forgive me for taking an interest in matters that are no longer my professional concern.

More specifically, some of the locals indicated they expected to be laid off in the forthcoming months. One of them said he had worked for the Mission for fourteen years and had no possibility of finding another job. This led me to inquire, when I returned to Washington, as to what kind of provisions are made for local employees around the world generally. I was told that some are under U.S. Civil Service retirement provisions and some are not, and that the distinction often lies simply in whether or not the individual Mission has taken the trouble to perform the necessary paperwork or to acquaint the employees with the possibilities. I also got the impression that some employees were covered in Tunis and some were not. I am sure that the Mission is fully as concerned with the fate of its local employees as I could possibly be from this distance, and that all the necessary planning has been accomplished. I did think, however, that you would not mind if I passed along the anxieties and uncertainty which some of the locals expressed to me. Again, I hope you will forgive me for being concerned with matters that are not within my responsibility.

Having served in several AID Missions overseas, I have often noticed that the local employees provide a body of continuity and dedicated service which we Americans sometimes take for granted. As we re-entrench our overseas efforts, I think it would be a tragic breach of faith with these people if we took care of ourselves better than we took care of them, particularly since our economic position is usually less vulnerable than theirs. Our American image overseas

is regrettably not what it was in the years after World War II for a variety of reasons, but fair treatment of those who have thrown in their lot with us could help to prevent a further erosion of our international image, or so it seems to me.

Regarding Tunis in general, I did get a very strong impression, albeit superficial, that things are going much better than when I last visited there in October 1969. At that time and in the years before, the streets seemed dead and the citizens apathetic. There was next to nothing in the shops, and a sort of glacial calm pervaded everything, which I used to find quite depressing. Today, the town seemed far more alive, the shops better stocked, and new construction going on. I attribute the remarkable change in the last fourteen months to the effects of the overthrow of Ben Salah and the unshackling of the economy. Someday, someone should take Tunisia as a case study of what happens when different economic systems are tried.

I regret not having had a chance to meet with you. Some of my friends in Tunis outside the Mission were lavish in your praise. With best wishes for a successful tour in what is surely one of the most beautiful little countries in the world.

Sincerely,

5/4 mailed 2/23
Ogden Williams
Coordinator
Viet-Nam Training Center