

# AMCN Newsletter

## 2018

### Word from the President Dr. Mohamed Boutjdir



Dear AMCN Members,

First, Happy New Year to all (even in February). As we are moving ahead with the annual AMCN 2018 forum (see page 3), other AMCN recent activities include the visit to US by a high level Moroccan delegation from the Ministry of Tourism (see page 5) seeking investments from US, an update on the Autism project and the toxoplasmosis project both of which were initiated from the US but are being currently implemented successfully in Morocco (see pages 8 and 10).

The annual forum on April 3<sup>rd</sup> 2018 in Marrakech aims at identifying Moroccan Competencies in the US working on areas of priority to the Moroccan government and matching their proposed projects with the appropriate partners in the private and/or public sectors in Morocco. The ultimate goal from this forum is to bring these participants F2F, discuss projects with mutual interest and eventually sign contracts or MOUs onsite.

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The Autism project, led by Hafida Torres with many other contributors such as Dr Abdesslem El-Idrissi and Dr Tahar Al Korchi has achieved several milestones by identifying the needs of parents and providers to efficiently work with autistic kids in Morocco. To this end, several students from US have worked directly with families and autism schools in Morocco rural and urban areas to collect and analyze data which will serve as a basis for training and education of parents and educators in Morocco. April 2<sup>nd</sup> 2018 is the international “lit is blue” event which has been regularly celebrated in major Moroccan Cities by lighting major landmarks in Morocco. This new tradition was initiated as part of the autism project!

The toxoplasmosis project is unique as after many years of preparations and hard work led to a recent award of a Fulbright U.S. Scholar in Medical Sciences and Public/Global Health to study Toxoplasmosis Morocco. This project is headed by Dr. El Bissati.

Collectively, AMCN and its members continue to be actively engaged in the socioeconomic development of Morocco.

**Mohamed Boutjdir**

President, AMCN

Professor, Department of Medicine, Cell Biology and Pharmacology

Professor, Department of Medicine, NYU School of Medicine

Director, Cardiovascular Research Program,

New York Harbor Healthcare System

New York, NY.

## The annual American Moroccan Competencies Forum : Marrakech: April 3th 2018



As part of the implementation of the 13th region-Marocains Entrepreneurs du Monde by Confédération Générale des Entreprises du Maroc and in partnership with le Ministère délégué auprès du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères et de la Coopération Internationale Chargé des Marocains Résidant à l'Étranger et des Affaires de la Migration, AMCN is organizing a Competencies Forum in Marrakech on April 3rd 2018.

The goal of this forum is to:

- mobilize American-Moroccan competencies in the service of socio-economic development of Morocco
- Promote opportunities for investment, commercialization, and collaboration in the thematic areas;
- Develop with Moroccan Officials the framework for selecting and supporting successful project proposals to completion;
- Highlight the expertise of US-Moroccans and their contribution to development of Morocco.

This initiative encourages any individual or group of Moroccans residing in the U.S, to submit an individual or a joint collaborative project with non-Moroccans living in the United States, in one of the 5 thematic areas developed below:

1. Industry including Automotive and Aeronautics, New Technologies and Entrepreneurship
2. Education, Higher Education, Scientific Research and Development
3. Health and Biomedical
4. Renewable Energy and Environment
5. Sociology and Models of Social Relations, Social Interaction and Culture



# Morocco Tourism Investment Roadshow

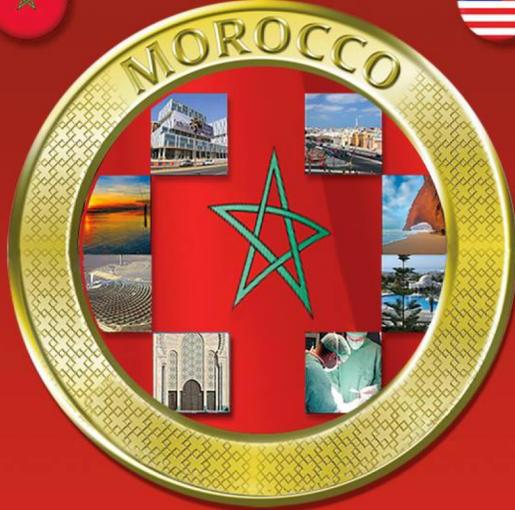
## NYC, January 30<sup>th</sup>-31, 2018.

Morocco Tourism Investment Road Show  
to the United States

*Promoting Investment in the Kingdom of Morocco*

InterContinental New York Barclay Hotel  
New York City, NY

January 30 – 31, 2018



Organized by:

- NUSACC National U.S.-Arab Chamber of Commerce  
غرفة التجارة الأمريكية العربية الوطنية
- Tourism Engineering and Investment  
SMIT MOROCCO

In Partnership with:

- American Moroccan COMPETENCIES NETWORK  
شبكة الكفاءات المغربية الأمريكية
- AIA
- GREATER NEW YORK CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Investment in the Kingdom of Morocco has been surging in recent years, especially in high tech (aeronautics and automotive) and alternative energy (solar). Tourism has been booming in certain parts of the country, and the Government of Morocco wants more communities to benefit from the growing hospitality sector.

In this context, the National US-Arab Chamber of Commerce (NUSACC) in partnership with the Société Marcaine d'Ingénierie Touristique (SMIT), the Embassy of Morocco in the United States, and the AMCN organized a B2B Morocco Tourism Investment Road Show, promoting American Investment in the Kingdom of Morocco in NYC on January 30th 2018.

This visit offered an excellent opportunity for U.S. companies and American individuals who:

- 1- Are looking for Tourism investment opportunities in frontier markets, like Morocco.
- 2- Are involved in the tourism "ecosystem," like developers, entertainment moguls, transportation logistics specialists,
- 3- support and/or supply tourism ecosystems.

To this purpose, a high level Moroccan delegation presented several competitive incentives to US investors interested in the tourism and hospitality sectors in Morocco. These include significant tax, land, financial subsidies and custom incentives.

The Moroccan delegation discussed with the prospective investors about these opportunities:

- Acquiring existing hotel or resort assets with ongoing operations, including brownfield projects, distressed properties, and trophy assets.
- Developing greenfield tourism and entertainment projects in emerging, mature, or premium destinations.
- Investing in public or private holding companies involved in tourism investment and operations.
- Investing in public company stocks in the Casablanca Stock Exchange that provide exposure to tourism investment and operations.

With this first-of-its-kind visit, the Road Show to the USA, highlighted Morocco's geostrategic location, infrastructure, and incentives, including the benefits of the Morocco – U.S. Free Trade Agreement (FTA)



For more information, visit: [www.amcnusa.org](http://www.amcnusa.org)

# Autism Project

Project Leader: Ms. Hafida Torres



January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018 a team from Worcester Polytechnic Institute WPI conducted data base collection studies on Autism in the region of Rabat, Temara, Sale and Casablanca, Morocco with the collaboration of AMCN, and Autism Speaks and WPI, and Moroccan NGOs.

The study, aiming to generate a report about the needs of the families and caregivers who have children with autism, will take place from January to March 2018. This study comes as part of the World Summit recommendations on autism organized by the Moroccan American Competencies Network organization in Rabat during the month of December 2014, and the result of the awareness seminars and educational training through the year 2018. Data base collection was a great initiative that generated a report about autism in Morocco which was edited by Dr Maretha De Jonge, Psychologist, (2016-2017).

Many associations are welcoming the WPI students during this initiative, to carry on with the data collection that was made 2016-2017, in order to generate other reports about the caregivers and professionals and clinicians' need in Morocco, followed by training of the professionals April 2018, in Casablanca, Morocco.

The WPI students' project played a tremendous role to visit more than four organizations and interviewed more than 30 families and caregivers what made other organizations, such as, La Passerelle organization to be ready to sign MOU with AMCN.

During our visit to Morocco, we had the opportunity to discuss AMCN's mission and objectives with different entities that are happy and thrilled to sign MOUs with AMCN, and build a strong relationship to give back to our beloved country, Morocco.

In the meantime, I want to inform our AMCN members that we were able to receive the IRB Approval for the scientific research and the parents' skill training in Morocco. Therefore, it is the inception of a new era for the Autism community in Morocco in terms of training professionals and organizing awareness events.



## Kamal El Bissati: U. of Chicago researcher receives Fulbright award to study toxoplasmosis in Morocco



Dr. Kamal El Bissati received his PhD from the University of Pierre and Marie Curie and Ecole Normale Supérieure, Ulm, Paris. He was a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Connecticut Medical School from 2003-2008. His pioneering work has led to the development of live attenuated strains for malaria vaccination. He expanded his scientific career at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York, where he was appointed as Instructor in the Department of Pathology. He is currently Assistant Professor in the Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences and serves as a member of the Global Health Committee at the University of Chicago Medical Center. His major research interests aim to develop novel vaccines and medicines to prevent or treat the parasitic infections, toxoplasmosis and malaria. In 2016, Dr Elbissati, in partnership with The National Institute of Hygiene of Rabat, organizes the first international symposium on Congenital Toxoplasmosis in Morocco at the National Institute of Hygiene. The symposium, was attended by numerous experts and specialists in congenital toxoplasmosis in Morocco, USA, France and Colombia, and was an opportunity for an exchange of experiences and agreements for new collaborations between participants from different geographical regions.

Recently Dr. El Bissati has been awarded a Fulbright U.S. Scholar Award in Medical Sciences and Public/Global Health to study Toxoplasmosis Morocco,

## Drop of blood to save lives in Morocco

Congenital toxoplasmosis is a well-known disease in pregnant women and presents serious risks for fetuses and people with weakened immune defense systems. Its severity in the pregnant woman can lead to congenital malformations, mainly affecting the brain tissue and the eye.

With a high at-risk population (50%) and a high exposure rate, Morocco, presents unique challenges to full identification and reporting of persons with congenital infection and the establishment of infrastructure for treatment after diagnosis in North Africa. Indeed, a seroprevalence among pregnant women ranging in Rabat between 47 % and 50.5%. In Casablanca, seroprevalence was estimated to be around 51.5%, while it was 45% in the Safi-Essaouira region. Nador, in the north of Morocco, was found to have a seroprevalence of 34.3%, while Tétouan and Kenitra had seroprevalences of 42 and 37.7%, respectively. In the south, around Agadir-Inezgane, the seroprevalence rate was 47.33% and No seroprevalence data from the rest of the country are available. This situation in morocco is mainly due, in many cases, to infrastructure which does not facilitate follow-up, and medicine to treat infected mothers is often unavailable, or only acquired with substantial expense. This is further complicated by extensive follow-up required during pregnancy to detect seroconversion, costs of confirmatory assays, and costs of appropriate follow-up of infected children for care. At present, pregnant women are often screened only once, early in pregnancy, and are told that they are seronegative or seropositive. Then, they do not follow up any further for additional screening because there is misunderstanding regarding the implications of a negative test or what to do about positive test results.

Dr Elbissati is presently working on the implementation of a point of care for testing Toxoplasma using a rapid test. The pilot study conducted by Dr Elbissati and collaborators, from a small population of women (40 in total) admitted at the National Institute of Hygiene (INH), shows 100% specificity and sensitivity. The team directed by Dr El bissati is now heading for a large scale testing that will involve women from rural and urban areas working on the site of Rabat, Casablanca (Ben Msik), Tinghir and suburbs of Settat.

## Drop of blood to save lives in Morocco

The principal of the test consists of collecting a drop of blood by finger stick for the use of test rapid with results read out in 10 min. When testing, if the pregnant woman is positive, no follow up. The person is immune. If the woman is negative for the first month, she need to come back next month for another test. She needs to keep herself negative until delivery. If she becomes positive within the gestational phase, she is in a seroconversion phase. She needs a special follow up and referral to specialists whether a treatment is needed, Also, while the cost of the conventional test is 260dhs, we are aiming to reduce this cost to 6\$ with this new rapid test. Explained Dr El Bissati.



“We are the first in the world to test a rapid kit. This is a paradigm shift on the use of novel technology for life-saving screening of pregnant women. Our goal is not to promote one company or another; it is to expand access to affordable screening for Toxoplasmosis infection to prevent morbidity and mortality”

Dr Kamal El Bissati

## Announcements & Ongoing Projects

### BECOME A MEMBER

Become an AMCN Member by registering at [www.amcnusa.org](http://www.amcnusa.org) and benefit from a vast network of Moroccan professionals in a variety of fields and learn about current and upcoming initiatives in Morocco and US.

### BECOME A NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTOR

Do you enjoy researching topics and writing? We are seeking content developers for the AMCN website and quarterly newsletter. If interested, drop us a line at: [www.amcnusa.org/contactus/](http://www.amcnusa.org/contactus/)

### BECOME A MEMBER OF ICT TEAM

AMCN is of great needs from members who have skills in information communication technology. If you wish to be part of our ICT team, please contact us.

### CONTACT US

[info@amcnusa.org](mailto:info@amcnusa.org)

[www.amcnusa.org](http://www.amcnusa.org)

### COMING SOON

The Annual American Moroccan Competencies Forum 2018 (<http://www.amcnusa.org/annual-forum-of-american-moroccan-competencies-2018/>)

### New Thematic Groups

AMCN is seeking experts in the following fields:

- Sociology and Models of Social Relations
- Art, Music, and Culture

For a complete list of AMCN's Thematic Groups visit:

(<http://www.amcnusa.org/thematic-groups/>)