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Jacqueline White,

Chief, Administrative Information Branch.

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**OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES
TRADE REPRESENTATIVE**

**The Trade and Investment Partnership
for the Middle East and North Africa**

AGENCY: Office of the United States
Trade Representative.

ACTION: Request for comments.

SUMMARY: In his May 19, 2011, speech on recent developments in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, the President called for a Trade and Investment Partnership Initiative to explore ways to further strengthen economic ties both between the United States and MENA countries and among the MENA countries themselves. Over the coming months, the United States, partnering where possible with the European Union and other key countries and entities, will launch a series of initiatives to facilitate more robust trade within the region and promote greater MENA integration with U.S. and other markets.

To ensure that a wide range of priorities and concerns are addressed, U.S. Government officials will continue to reach out to business, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academia and other stakeholders in order to elicit ideas for shaping future economic engagement with this critical region.

As part of this process, the U.S. Government welcomes written input from members of the public on ideas for deepening economic ties with and among MENA countries.

DATES: Written comments should be submitted no later than October 15, 2011.

Submissions: To facilitate expeditious handling, the public is strongly encouraged to submit documents electronically via <http://www.regulations.gov>, docket number USTR-2011-xxxx. Submissions should contain the term "2011 Middle East and North Africa Trade" in the "Type comment & Upload file:" field on <http://www.regulations.gov>.

To find the docket, enter the docket number in the "Enter Keyword or ID" window at the <http://www.regulations.gov> home page and click "Search." The site will provide a

search-results page listing all documents associated with this docket. Find a reference to this notice by selecting "Notices" under "Document Type" on the search-results page, and click on the link entitled "Submit a Comment." (For further information on using the <http://www.regulations.gov> Web site, please consult the resources provided on the Web site by clicking on the "Help" tab.) The <http://www.regulations.gov> Web site provides the option of making submissions by filling in a comments field, or by attaching a document. USTR prefers submissions to be provided in an attached document. USTR prefers submissions in Microsoft Word (.doc) or Adobe Acrobat (.pdf). If the submission is in an application other than those two, please indicate the name of the application in the "Comments" field.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Sonia Franceski, Director for Middle East Affairs, (202) 395-4987, Office of the United States Trade Representative, 600 17th Street, NW., Washington, DC 20508.

Background

The relationship between the United States and countries of the Middle East and North Africa is built upon some of the most important geostrategic and economic links in the world. In order to further reinforce cooperation with, and expand economic ties to, a part of the world undergoing profound change, the President on May 19 called for the launch of a Trade and Investment Partnership Initiative for the MENA region to: (1) Facilitate more trade within the region, (2) build on existing agreements to promote integration with U.S. and European markets, and (3) open the door for those countries that adopt high standards of reform and trade liberalization to construct a regional trade arrangement.

Fostering greater trade and more open economic policies continue to represent positive opportunities for U.S. engagement with the region. With a growing population of over 400 million, an expanding regional GDP topping \$2.4 trillion, and \$1 trillion in various sovereign investment funds, the nations of the MENA region continue to offer significant potential opportunities for U.S. exporters and investors. Collectively, MENA countries in 2010 ranked as the fifth largest destination for U.S. exports, with a total of \$60 billion. Although economic activity in significant parts of the region is still dominated by energy industries, this is by no means universal. Governments in many countries are striving to provide

greater job opportunities for predominantly young workforces and (where appropriate) diversify their economies to offset oil/gas price volatility.

The U.S. strategy for encouraging a more open business climate in the MENA region will consist of a series of building blocks, in which the United States attempts to consolidate gains already achieved, to launch new efforts, where possible, to foster the adoption of modern open market policies, and to stimulate greater regional cooperation.

As it pursues this strategy, the United States will seek to intensify its engagement with the EU and other key countries with the aim of reducing or eliminating barriers to trade and investment among MENA countries, and between MENA and developed country markets.

The U.S. Government welcomes concrete ideas from interested stakeholders for specific government actions that can enhance economic integration within the MENA region and increase trade and investment, both with—and within—the MENA region. Such ideas can build on efforts already underway and may cover a broad range of barriers and sectors. Ideally they would identify priorities both for the near and longer term. Based on experience to date, and without suggesting any limitations, the United States has identified the following general areas of focus:

(a) *Technical barriers to trade in goods:* reinforcing efforts to eliminate or substantially lower, where possible, remaining barriers;

(b) *Services:* aiming to substantially improve opportunities for services providers (both large and small) and facilitate services trade and investment in the region across a wide range of sectors;

(c) *Agriculture:* strengthening regulatory cooperation in the field of human, plant and animal health issues, including biotechnology, while recognizing the importance of continuing to improve our respective regulatory processes and of improving our scientific cooperation;

(d) *Trade Facilitation:* improving trans-border shipment of goods by increasing the certainty of how goods will be processed at the border;

(e) *Investment:* exploring practical solutions through changes in domestic law, policies, or practices that could help boost confidence in the rule of law and local institutions in the region and stimulate further inward investment across a wide range of sectors;

(f) *Intellectual property:* improving IPR protection and reducing costs;

(g) *Transparency*: enhancing and promoting public participation in economic policy formulation; and

(h) *SMEs*: improving support systems and access to export opportunities.

L. Daniel Mullaney,

Assistant United States Trade Representative for Europe and the Middle East.

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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Office of the Secretary

[DOT-OST-2011-0165]

Notice of Rights and Protections Available Under the Federal Antidiscrimination and Whistleblower Protection Laws

AGENCY: Department of Transportation, Office of the Secretary.

ACTION: No FEAR Act Notice.

SUMMARY: This Notice implements Title II of the Notification and Federal Employee Antidiscrimination and Retaliation Act of 2002 (No Fear Act of 2002). It is the annual obligation for Federal agencies to notify all employees, former employees, and applicants for Federal employment of the rights and protections available to them under the Federal Anti-discrimination and Whistleblower Protection Laws.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Caffin Gordon, Associate Director of Policy and Quality Control Division, S-35, Departmental Office of Civil Rights, Office of the Secretary, U.S. Department of Transportation, 1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE., Room W78-312, Washington, DC 20590, 202-366-4648 or by e-mail at caffin.gordon@dot.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Electronic Access

You may retrieve this document online through the Federal Document Management System at <http://www.regulations.gov>. Electronic retrieval instructions are available under the help section of the Web site. An electronic copy is also available for download from the Government Printing Office's Electronic Bulletin Board at <http://www.nara.gov/fedreg> and the Government Printing Office's Web page at <http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara>.

No Fear Act Notice

On May 15, 2002, Congress enacted the "Notification and Federal Employee Antidiscrimination and Retaliation Act of 2002," now recognized as the No

FEAR Act (Pub. L. 107-174). One purpose of the Act is to "require that Federal agencies be accountable for violations of antidiscrimination and whistleblower protection laws." (Pub. L. 107-174, Summary). In support of this purpose, Congress found that "agencies cannot be run effectively if those agencies practice or tolerate discrimination" (Pub. L. 107-174, Title I, General Provisions, section 101(1)). The Act also requires the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) to provide this Notice to all USDOT employees, former USDOT employees, and applicants for USDOT employment. This Notice is to inform you of the rights and protections available to you under Federal antidiscrimination and whistleblower protection laws.

Antidiscrimination Laws

A Federal agency cannot discriminate against an employee or applicant with respect to the terms, conditions, or privileges of employment because of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, marital status, or political affiliation. Discrimination on these bases is prohibited by one or more of the following statutes: 5 U.S.C. 2302(b)(1), 29 U.S.C. 631, 29 U.S.C. 633a, 29 U.S.C. 206(d), 29 U.S.C. 791, and 42 U.S.C. 2000e-16.

If you believe you were a victim of unlawful discrimination on the bases of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, and/or disability, you must contact an Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) counselor within 45 calendar days of the alleged discriminatory action, or in the case of a personnel action, within 45 calendar days of the effective date of the action to try and resolve the matter informally. This must be done before filing a formal complaint of discrimination with USDOT (See, e.g., 29 CFR part 1614).

If you believe you were a victim of unlawful discrimination based on age, you must either contact an EEO counselor as noted above or give notice of intent to sue to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) within 180 calendar days of the alleged discriminatory action. As an alternative to filing a complaint pursuant to 29 CFR part 1614, you can file a civil action in a United States district court under the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA), against the head of an alleged discriminating agency, after giving the EEOC not less than a 30 day notice of the intent to file such action. You may file such notice in writing with the EEOC via mail at P.O. Box 77960, Washington, DC 20013, personal delivery, or facsimile within 180 days of

the occurrence of the alleged unlawful practice.

If you are alleging discrimination based on marital status or political affiliation, you may file a written discrimination complaint with the U.S. Office of Special Counsel (OSC) (See Contact information below). In the alternative (or in some cases, in addition), you may pursue a discrimination complaint by filing a grievance through the USDOT administrative or negotiated grievance procedures, if such procedures apply and are available. Form OSC-11 is available online at the OSC Web site <http://www.osc.gov/index.htm>, under the filing tab (*Contact Information*). Additionally, you can download the form under the same filing tab, under OSC Forms. Complete this form and mail it to the Complaints Examining Unit, U.S. Office of Special Counsel at 1730 M Street, NW., Suite 218 Washington, DC 20036-4505. You also have the option to call the Complaints Examining Unit at 800-872-9855 for additional assistance.

If you are alleging compensation discrimination pursuant to the Equal Pay Act (EPA), and wish to pursue your allegations through the administrative process, you must contact an EEO counselor within 45 calendar days of the alleged discriminatory action as such complaints are processed under EEOC's regulations at 29 CFR part 1614. Alternatively, you may file a civil action in a court of competent jurisdiction within two years, or if the violation is willful, three years of the date of the alleged violation, regardless of whether you pursued any administrative complaint processing. The filing of a complaint or appeal pursuant to 29 CFR part 1614 shall not toll the time for filing a civil action.

Whistleblower Protection Laws

A USDOT employee with authority to take, direct others to take, recommend, or approve any personnel action must not use that authority to take, or fail to take, or threaten to take, or fail to take a personnel action against an employee or applicant because of a disclosure of information by that individual that is reasonably believed to evidence violations of law rule, or regulation; gross mismanagement; gross waste of funds; an abuse of authority; or a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety, unless the disclosure of such information is specifically prohibited by law and such information is specifically required by Executive Order to be kept secret in the interest of national defense or the conduct of foreign affairs.