

A Common Word:

A letter from 138 Muslim Scholars to the Pope and Christian Leaders

Amman, Jordan — On October 13th 2006, on the occasion of Eid al Fitr and one month to the day after Pope Benedict XVI's Regensburg address of September 13th 2006, 38 Islamic authorities and scholars from around the world, representing all denominations and schools of thought, joined together to deliver an answer to the Pope in the spirit of open intellectual exchange and mutual understanding. In their *Open Letter to the Pope*, for the first time in recent history, Muslim scholars from every branch of Islam spoke with one voice about the true teachings of Islam.

Now, exactly one year after that letter, Muslims have expanded their message. In *A Common Word Between Us and You*, 138 Muslim scholars, clerics and intellectuals have unanimously come together for the first time since the days of the Prophet (*peace be upon him*) to declare the common ground between Christianity and Islam. Like the Open Letter, the signatories to this message come from every denomination and school of thought in Islam. Every major Islamic country or region in the world is represented in this message, which is addressed to the leaders of all the world's churches, and indeed to all Christians everywhere.

The final form of the letter was presented at a conference in September 2007 held under the theme of "Love in the Quran," by the Royal Academy of The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought in Jordan, under the Patronage of His Majest King Abdullah II. Indeed, the most fundamental common

ground between Islam and Christianity, and the best basis for future dialogue and understanding, is the love of God and the love of the neighbor.

“The most fundamental common ground between Islam and Christianity, and the best basis for future dialogue and understanding, is the love of God and the love of the neighbor.”

Never before have Muslims delivered this kind of definitive consensus statement on Christianity. Rather than engage in polemic, the signatories have adopted the traditional and mainstream Islamic position of respecting the Christian scripture and calling Christians to be more, not less, faithful to it.

It is hoped that this document will provide a common constitution for the many worthy organizations and individuals who are carrying out interfaith dialogue all over

the world. Often these groups are unaware of each other, and duplicate each other's efforts. Not only can *A Common Word Between Us* give them a starting point for cooperation and worldwide coordination, but it does so on the *most solid theological ground possible*: the teachings of the Qu'ran and the Prophet (*peace be upon him*), and the commandments described by Jesus Christ in the Bible. Thus despite their differences, Islam and Christianity not only share the same Divine Origin and the same Abrahamic heritage, but the same *two greatest commandments*.

Full text of *A Common Word* and a list of the Signatories to *A Common Word* is available online at www.jordanembassyus.org/new/pr/commonword.shtml





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Jordan Ascends to 8th Rank on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Index

By Mohammad Ghazal



AMMAN, October 19 (Jordan Times) - Jordan ranked 8th out of 141 countries in inward investment performance in 2006, according to the 2007 World Investment Report issued by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

Meanwhile, Jordan Investment Board (JIB) CEO Maen Nsour told The Jordan

Times that investments benefiting from the Investment Promotion Law amounted to JD2.16 billion between January 1 and October 1, 2007. Of this, JD1.7 billion was invested in the industrial sector.

These figures, he said, mark a drastic improvement over the 2006 investments during the same period, when JD1.6 billion was invested in the country, benefiting from the said law, JD1.3 billion of which were in the industrial sector.

The UNCTAD report is of great significance to the Kingdom, Nsour said, as it shows that the country has an improved inward performance, as indicated by the index. It advanced from the 19th place in 2005 to 8th in 2006.

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Jordan Buys Back Debt Owed to Paris Club at 11% Discount Rate

AMMAN, Oct. 19 (Jordan Times) - The Paris Club has agreed to a Jordanian proposal to retire at least \$2.153 billion in previously rescheduled, non-official development assistance loans owed to Paris Club creditor countries at an average discount rate to face value of 11 per cent.

The multilateral agreement follows discussions held between His Majesty King Abdullah and the leadership of major creditor countries in the last few months. Minister of Finance Hamad Kasasbeh led the Jordanian delegation to the negotiations with the Paris Club.

The face value of Jordan's total external debt stands at around \$7.051 billion, or about 45 per cent of GDP, down from more than 84 per cent in 2000 and 64 per cent in 2004. Of the total debt, more than half (\$4.385 billion) is owed to Paris Club creditor countries.

According to Kasasbeh, all creditor countries supported the agreement with

the understanding that at least eight will participate in the buyback operation: France (\$858 million), the UK (\$694 million), the US (\$361 million), Spain (\$92 million), Italy (\$71 million), Switzerland (\$36 million), Germany (\$30 million) and Belgium (\$11 million).

Kasasbeh said it is expected that about \$2.153 billion in debt will be retired at an 11 per cent discount, for a total of \$1.912 billion. Future commitments on this portion of Jordan's debt (in both principal and interest) amount to \$3.021 billion.

According to the minister, the debt buyback will be financed by utilizing part of the privatization funds in line with the 2000 Privatization Law, in addition to other available funding resources.

Kasasbeh stressed that the debt buyback agreement comes at a critical time for Jordan and is a "clear sign of confidence in the process adopted by the

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3 Million Visitors Registered between January, June; Tourism Revenues Rise by 20.6 per cent

By Dalya Dajani, Jordan Times

Visitor numbers continued to grow during the first six months of this year, with tourist arrivals 13.8 per cent higher than the same period of 2006, official figures revealed.


Preliminary figures released by the Ministry of Tourism indicated that around 3 million tourists visited the country between January and June, compared to 2.633 million during the same period of last year.

Tourism revenues also rose 20.6 per cent, from JD470.8 million in 2006 to JD567.8 million this year, the Central Bank of Jordan reported.

Tourists from Arab and Gulf countries formed the bulk of arrivals, rising 9.4 per cent to 844,441 visitors between January

and June this year compared to 772,032 visitors in the same period of 2006.55 per cent of all overnight visitors to the Kingdom during the first six months of this year.

Arrivals from the Americas rose by 13 per cent in the same comparative period — from 71,681 to 81,000.

Nearly half the overnight stays were in Amman, with 118,159 tourists staying in the capital for at least two nights and almost 25 per cent, or 75,355 visitors, spending an average of two nights in Petra. A total of 30,904 tourists spent the night in Aqaba and 24,385 at the Dead Sea, accounting for around 11 per cent of arrivals on package tours. 

US Grants to Support Health and Education Services

By Hani Hazaimeh

Amman, Sept. 25, 2007 (Jordan Times) — The US will provide a total of \$99.69 million to help the Kingdom spur economic growth and improve basic health and education services throughout the country.

Minister of Planning and International Cooperation Suhair Al-Ali signed the two grant agreements with American Ambassador David Hale and USAID Mission Director Jay Knott on September 24, 2007. The agreements constitute the final batch of the overall US assistance package to Jordan for the fiscal year 2007, which totals \$255.30 million in economic assistance and \$276.80 million in security-related assistance.

In remarks during the signing ceremony, Hale reiterated the US government's commitment to support Jordan's sustainable economic and social development. "We are proud to provide such sup-

port, which is in line with King Abdullah's vision for a better life for all Jordanians and equal opportunities for all," he said.

The first grant, valued at \$58.8 million, will support improvements in the health and education sectors, including the construction of new schools across the Kingdom, as well as enhancing health services in public hospitals, according to Al-Ali.

Around \$30 million will be allocated for the construction of 30 schools, renovation of another 100 schools and equipping some 190 kindergarten classes in poor and underserved areas, with around \$700,000 earmarked for the design of these facilities, Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Khalid Touqan said.

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USAID Supports Third Tourism Project in Jordan

Amman, Sept. 27 (Jordan Times) —

The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities on Sept.



25th announced the signing of a memorandum of understanding with the USAID/ Jordan Tourism Development Project (Siyaha) for expanded support in implementation of the Third Tourism Development Project. The \$70 million project, financed by the government and the World Bank, seeks to upgrade five historical (tourism) districts around the country in partnership with the local municipalities in Madaba, Salt, Jerash, Ajloun and Karak, according to a Siyaha statement.

"In addition to enhancements in infrastructure in those cities, part of the investment will be directed towards grants to local businesses, an area in which USAID/Siyaha will assist us," said Ihab Ammarin, director of the ministry's technical department directorate, which is responsible for managing the project in partnership with the Ministry of Public Works and Housing.

USAID/Siyaha will assist the project in the design of its \$1 million local economic development component, which will target CBOs and NGOs in the five cities, as well as providing assistance for the project's public awareness aspects.

"USAID is pleased to provide the Jordanian government with the needed support to ensure investment in the target cities is matched with investment in people and business," said USAID Jordan Mission Director Jay Knott, citing that USAID/Siyaha's efforts in Madaba have

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Roundup: Embassy Events

The Embassy of Jordan hosted a number of organizations and universities in the past two months, including a group of law students from American University, students from the College of William and Mary, participants from the American Civics Center and the Elderhostel, Jordanian Fellows in Legal and Business Services and the Friends of Jordan Association. The Jordan Information Bureau along with the Jordan Tourism Board North America also participated in the Society of Professional Journalist convention in Washington, D.C.

These events were part of the Embassy's public diplomacy efforts, organized by the Jordan Information Bureau. The aim is to introduce the Washington DC audience to the different aspects of the socio-political and cultural heritage of Jordan and the wider Arab and Muslim world.



Prince Zeid Ra'ad Presents Credentials to Mexican President

Jordan's Ambassador to Washington HRH Prince Zeid Ben Raad on Oct. 24 presented his credentials as non-resident ambassador to Mexico to President Felipe Calderon. During his meeting with Calderon, the Prince conveyed His Majesty King Abdullah's greetings, highlighting the King's keenness in developing relations between Jordan and Mexico. 



A Jordanian Success Story:

Luma Mufleh Ends Up with More Than a Dream Come True

By Rana Hussein



Photo courtesy of Ms. Mufleh

Jordanian coach Luma Mufleh during a training session of her team 'Fugees' in Clarkston, Georgia

Amman, (Jordan Times) — Luma Mufleh left Jordan for the United States in the early 1990s to study, but ended up achieving more than what she opted for. Now 32, Mufleh has a \$3 million deal with Hollywood's Universal Studios to produce a film about her life.

After finishing her undergraduate studies in anthropology and government at Smith College in Massachusetts in 1997, Mufleh decided to stay in the US in search of further opportunities.

For almost 10 years after finishing her education, she coached little league soccer. The Fugees, a team she established three years ago in Clarkston, Georgia, consisting of refugee boys made the difference. After all, they reminded her of home, she says. "This is how I grew up. Half of the people around me were Muslims and half were Christians. It gave me a sense of home in America," she told the Jordan Times in a recent telephone interview.

Mufleh's attachment to the refugee community extended to creating hope

amongst the players' families after she learned of their economic hardships. She established a cleaning company called "Fresh Start" and employed refugee women and offered them almost double the minimum wage they were earning in their original jobs.

Mufleh also ensured female refugees equality by establishing the first women's Fugees team. "I wanted to coach both male and female teams but their families at first refused to allow their girls to play and instead wanted them to cook and clean because they were girls," she said.

But eventually, because of her persistence and the trust she built with these families, Mufleh succeeded in persuading them to accept the idea.

Despite her love and care for her team members, they know Mufleh as being a strict coach. If they miss a practice session, they do not play the next game. If they miss two sessions they are out for good.

Away from the soccer field, Mufleh

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Embassy of Jordan and the Friends of Jordan Association Hosted Iftar during the Holy Month of Ramadan

AMMAN (JT) - The Embassy of Jordan in Washington, DC and the Friends of Jordan Association hosted an Iftar gathering at the embassy on Oct. 2 in an effort to support the association's work.

Both the embassy and the Friends of Jordan Association (www.friendsofjordan.org) share a common goal: Promoting Jordan, its people, history and culture across the United States and enhancing understanding of the Kingdom's unique role in the region as a beacon of hope and moderation.

The Friends of Jordan Association was created in 2004 by returned Peace Corps Volunteers who served in Jordan, according to a statement released by the embassy.

Its membership also includes current or former Peace Corps staff and other individuals or groups who share a common interest in Jordan.

HRH Prince Zeid Raad, Jordan's ambassador to the United States, commended the work of the association and their dedication to deepening ties between the peoples of Jordan and the United States. Given that the organization is led

primarily by returning Peace Corps volunteers and in the spirit of the holy month of Ramadan, Prince Zeid expressed his admiration for volunteers' work, especially in rural areas of the Kingdom.

"Your contributions and tireless efforts are much appreciated in Jordan. Your cause is indeed a noble one, reminding us of our shared values and of the need to build on our commonalities while we respect and accept our differences."

The gathering was attended by members of the diplomatic community, representatives from the Arab and Muslim American communities as well as members of the Jordanian community in Washington, DC.

Organised by the Jordan Information Bureau, the iftar gathering also exhibited photographs of different regions across Jordan taken by former Peace Corps volunteers in Jordan.

Friends of Jordan is affiliated with the National Peace Corps Association, which is a nonprofit organisation of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers and former or current Peace Corps staff.

Friends of Jordan membership is separate and apart from Peace Corps Volunteer

Jordan Ascends
from page 2

The official said the report indicates that measures taken by the government at practical and legislative levels have helped boost confidence in the investment environment of the Kingdom, which now has great potential to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).

The report ranks Jordan 4th among the top five recipients of FDI inflows in West Asian countries between 2005-2006, said Nsour.

"We are on the right track, but we should not be satisfied with this. The government should exert further efforts to create a more conducive investment environment," Nsour said.

He also added that "There should be continuous work to preserve what was achieved and to build on it to continue developing the business environment." ❧

status, the statement said. Neither Friends of Jordan nor the National Peace Corps Association has a formal connection to the Peace Corps federal agency. ❧

Minister Al-Ali Conducts Meetings with Several Senior Officials at the World Bank and the U.S. Administration

Amman, Oct. 23 (Petra)—During a working visit to the United States, Minister of Planning and International Cooperation Suhair Al-Ali, head of the Jordanian delegation to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund's annual meetings in Washington D.C., conducted numerous meetings with senior officials at the World Bank, US State Department and US Treasury

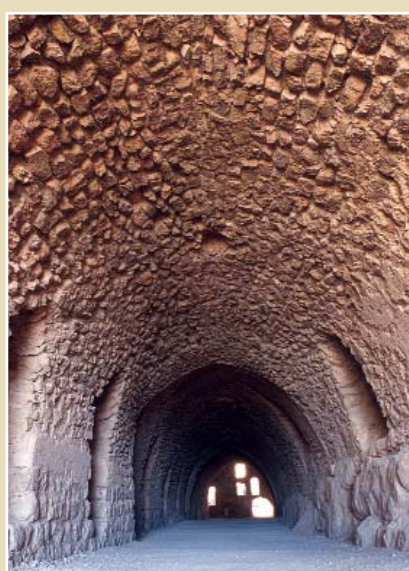
Throughout her meetings Minister Al-Ali underlined the economic, social and political reforms that have recently been undertaken in addition to the recent adoption of several new laws by the govern-

ment and the parliament which have institutionalized these reforms. The Minister also highlighted the achievements that have been made despite the significant fiscal, political and social challenges that Jordan continues to face.

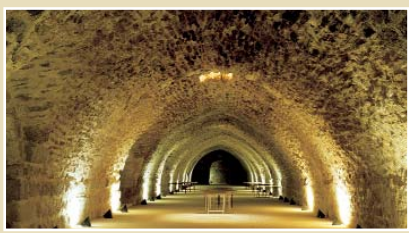
Central to Al-Ali's meetings with the President of the World Bank Group Mr. Robert Zoellick and other senior World Bank officials, was Jordan's request to increase the amount of technical assistance given to Jordan in particular providing value added services such as risk management and sectoral reviews. This request was in line with the Minister's

Middle Income Country keynote presentation that was made to the Independent Evaluation Group at the annual World Bank meetings. During the presentation the Minister presented Jordan's case as a Middle Income Country that requires targeted and results-oriented assistance to accelerate growth, alleviate poverty, and hasten the delivery of the fruits of reform to larger segments of the population. The minister also referred to the G11 initiative as an example of cooperation among lower middle income countries to achieve prosperity for its people. ❧

DID YOU KNOW...



...Ridley Scot's recent Hollywood blockbuster *'The Kingdom of Heaven'* starring Orlando Bloom, has numerous scenes based in and around the crusader castle at Karak, although the castle itself was not used during filming.



...The best preserved halls and passageways are located underground and can only be reached through a massive door – ask at the ticket desk.

...While it could hardly be described as beautiful, Karak is an impressive example of the Crusaders' architectural military genius.

...The city of Karak was the ancient capital of Moab. During Roman times it was known as Characmoba.

source: www.visitjordan.com

Karak

a maze of stone-vaulted halls and endless passageways



Photos from www.visitjordan.com

By Jeremy Makover, JIB

An ancient Crusader stronghold, Karak sits 900m above sea level. The city today is home to around 170,000 people and continues to boast a number of restored 19th century Ottoman buildings, restaurants, and the like. But it is undoubtedly Karak Castle which dominates.

Karak has been a fortress since biblical times. It took the Crusaders some twenty years to erect their vast castle. Finished in 1161, it became the residence of the lord of Transjordan, then the most important fief of the Crusader kingdom. Saladin, the Crusader kingdom; the defenders of Karak held out for eight months in a prolonged siege before surrendering to the Muslims who mercifully allowed them to walk free. Karak became the capital of a district covering much of Jordan, playing a central role in Middle Eastern politics for the next two centuries. For a time, Karak even became capital of the whole Mameluk kingdom when Sultan an-Nasir Ahmad grew weary of power struggles in Cairo.

Under the Ayyubids and early Mameluk sultans, the castle was substantially renovated and the town's fortifications strengthened with massive towers

but access to the town was through subterranean passages, with entrances still visible today.

Karak castle impressed observers of the Medieval period. One visitor to Karak was the famous fourteenth-century traveller, Ibn Battouta. During his extraordinary journeys, he undertook the Muslim pilgrimage to the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina. Part of his journey from Damascus took him south through Jordan via the King's Highway. He records that the pilgrims stopped at the village of al-Thaniyya, located on a hill east of Karak. From here it was possible to see the castle. He writes:

"Then the travellers came to the castle of Karak which is one of the most marvelous, most inaccessible and most celebrated of castles. It is called the "Castle of the Raven", *hisn al-ghurab*."

In later times, the town more often than not became a refuge for rebels, while the castle was used as the gathering place of tribal councils. Firm Turkish administration was enforced after 1894 and the Mameluk palace inside the castle was used as a prison.

Basra, Iraq Prosthetics Project

Washington & Amman — Rotary International Clubs in District #7620 have partnered with other Rotary clubs and organizations in an all volunteer humanitarian project to assist civilian amputees in Iraq's Basra region. Rotary District #7620 is comprised of 71 clubs in Central Maryland and Washington D.C. and the initiative is hosted in Amman, Jordan by the Amman Cosmopolitan Rotary Club.

Working closely with the Basra Prosthetics Centre, an Iraqi Ministry of Health Centre which serves four districts, the objective of the project is to train Iraqi Ministry of Health doctors and prosthetists at the Al Hussein Society in Amman, Jordan and provide prosthetic medical supplies and equipment to the Basra Centre.

According to Dr. Muslim Al-Asady,

Director of the Basra Centre, it is estimated that there are over 5,000 amputees in the region and the Centre does not have the prosthetic supplies or production capability to address the needs of the local civilian amputee population. At the current rate of prosthetic production it would take over a decade to address the current needs of the prosthetics centre assuming no new cases.

Recognising the urgency of the need for prosthetic medical supplies, the Al Hussein Society, a partner to the project, arranged for their own inventory to be purchased and shipped to the Basra Clinic. Chairperson and Founder of the Basra Prosthetics Project, Rotarian Linda Smythe said she was very impressed with the Al Hussein Society and announced agreement had been reached with them to

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Minister of Labor Inaugurates Online Career Network in Jordan

Al Bawaba.com

Amman, July 2007 -- Jordan's Minister of Labor, his Excellency Bassem Al Salem, inaugurated this July— "Akhtaboot"— a pioneer online career network based in Jordan and serving the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, during a press conference held at the Four Seasons Hotel.

Akhtaboot, Arabic for Octopus, is the first online career network in the Middle East and North Africa market. It is designed to match the right person with the right job through online traditional job postings, word of mouth postings as well as online business and professional networking. The site is unique in serving both employers and career or job seekers who are either actively searching for employment or interested in building a professional network of business contacts.

Akhtaboot.com is also the only career site in the Middle East that is qualified as a Myers-Briggs (MBTI) provider- a global

leader in personality tests used widely by Fortune 500 companies worldwide both for hiring and human resource development purposes.

"Akhtaboot is recruitment made easy" said Yousef Shamoun, Co-founder of Akhtaboot and Head of Sales and Marketing. "The services provided by

Akhtaboot.com are based on research and the employers' feedback which allow us to find solutions to recruitment aches and pains, while minimizing the level of unemployment in the country." He added.

With regards to choosing Jordan for Akhtaboot's headquarters, Shamoun said "Jordan enjoys an attractive investment climate; political and financial stability, a diverse cultural base, a growing economy, state-of-the-art infrastructure and communication networks, in addition to having an educated, hospitable and bilingual people." ☞



Luma Mufleh
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said the most challenging moments are when she educates people about her religion and cultural



identity. "Most people here are surprised to see me with a T-shirt and shorts since I am an immigrant and a Muslim. Being a Muslim and being an Arab are big identities to me and I try to explain that to them," she said.

Her sense of commitment and dedication has helped change the lives of many and brought her fame. A New York Times article drew national attention in the US, and Mufleh was invited by colleges, communities and the United Nations to speak about her experience on World Refugees Day in June.

Aside from the financial reward and media exposure, Mufleh said the self-actualization she has achieved in her life was the best thing that has happened to her.

"The most frequent question by people was how I was able to make it. My answer is simple: I started by bringing out the ball to the street. You have to talk to your community and understand what they need. I hope others will start similar programs to improve their communities."

Aside from the film, book and coaching, Mufleh said her future will remain with the Fugees. "I keep telling the kids that I will leave when the youngest of you graduate but I cannot stop or leave them. It is something that I started. And I want to be with these kids because they have completely changed the way I see the world." ☞

Often described as the eighth wonder of the ancient world, it is without doubt Jordan's most valuable treasure and greatest tourist attraction. It is a vast, unique city, carved into the sheer rock face by the Nabataeans, an industrious Arab people who settled here more than 2000 years ago, turning it into an important junction for the silk, spice and other trade routes that linked China, India and southern Arabia with Egypt, Syria, Greece and Rome.



Basra, Iraq
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conduct the training of the Iraqi Ministry of Health Doctors, Prosthetists, Physiotherapists and Technicians.

Smythe also announced that HRH Princess Majda Raad of Jordan has very graciously accepted to be the honorary patroness of the project. In an open letter to Smythe, HRH Princess Majda writes: *"The partnering Rotary clubs in the United States and the host club, the Amman Cosmopolitan Rotary Club, have embarked on an important project to bring much needed relief to civilian amputees in the Basra region. I commend this all volunteer initiative which not only reflects dedication to a great humanitarian need but also brings together in friendship and compassion the people of Iraq, Jordan and the United States."*

There are many other partnering organizations to include the Hanger Orthopedic Group, the U.S. Dept. of State which awarded the project a \$200,000 grant, the Mosaic Foundation, which is run by the wives of the Arab Ambassadors to the United States, the IMF, the Ministry of Health in Iraq, and the embassies of Iraq and Jordan.

Visit www.basraproject.com 


U.S. Grants from page 3

He added that the ministry will spend \$7.76 million to improve healthcare at schools.

Around \$20.3 million of the first grant (including \$2.3 million in supplemental funds) will be provided to improve safe delivery services for mothers and their newborn babies in 24 of the Kingdom's 30 public hospitals. This will be part of a larger effort to strengthen primary and reproductive health services in all public health clinics and hospitals, encouraging family planning and promoting healthy lifestyles.

The grant will improve secondary

school education by providing young people with the skills needed to compete in the job market, developing innovative e-learning programmes, training teachers, and establishing a standards and accreditation system, according to Touqan.

Under the second grant agreement, the US will provide \$40.9 million to spur trade, increase investment, and create job opportunities in an effort to tackle unemployment. The grant will promote economic growth by supporting activities that encourage the private sector to seize opportunities presented by trade liberalisation agreements, provide business development services to small and medium-sized enterprises, and develop the tourism industry. 


USAID Supports from page 3

resulted in mobilizing more than \$2 million in private sector investment in hotels, restaurants, crafts and tourism services in the city.

The ministry noted that USAID/Siyaha has implemented a variety of successful initiatives, most notably in Madaba, which the project wishes to emulate in the other cities, according to the statement. The Madaba visitor centre, mosaic school, vocational training centre, Archaeological Park and Church of the Map are all undergoing development to complement the

physical upgrade that the project will bring.

Construction for this will begin early next year, the statement said, adding that detailed designs for the projects are complete and various construction packages are due to be awarded this quarter for all five cities.

Its main components include physical and economic revitalisation of historic cores, preservation and regeneration of cultural landscape, and in Ajloun, natural landscape, and improving urban management, financial capacity, and financial autonomy of the five municipalities, according to the statement. 

Jordan Buys from page 2

Kingdom and its leadership to foster development and improve the standard of living of citizens". The agreement will also have positive results in terms of strengthening the sustainability of Jordan's development program, he said.

Kasasbeh said the deal will also reduce Jordan's debt service obligations in the future, allowing increased investment in education, healthcare and other sectors, as well as improve Jordan's balance of payment position, international credit rating and international investor confidence in the economy. 