

## **Speech by Cheikh Rached Ghannouchi at the Jamnalal Bajaj Ceremony Award**

**(November 7, 2016)**

Ladies and gentlemen,

السلام عليكم

Peace be with you all,

Good evening

Thank you to your esteemed Foundation for choosing me as the recipient of the Jamnalal Bajaj International Award for 2016 for promoting Gandhian values outside India.

It is a great honor for me to receive this award.

I would like to congratulate the other award winners here with us tonight.

As I stand in front of you tonight, I remember a very famous saying by the Great Mahatma Gandhi, who said:

First they ignore you,

Then they laugh at you,

Then they fight you,

Then you win.

This quote, summarises beautifully what our people have gone through during the long decades of oppression, dictatorship, torture, and corruption.

However, Prisons, exile, oppression, did not succeed in defeating the will of our people, and their desire for freedom and dignity.

Our great Tunisian people have succeeded in bringing down the dictatorship peacefully.

Our people have also created what has become known as the Tunisian exception through their belief in democracy, and through adopting dialogue and compromise, as the only way for solving differences.

This is why, today I would like to dedicate this award to the Tunisian people.

I would like to dedicate this award especially to the youth, the women, and all the victims of dictatorship for their courage, and sacrifices in the struggle for democracy and freedom.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Mahatma Gandhi said that

The weak can never forgive,

Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.

I believe, that the principles of forgiveness, and compromise, are what saved Tunisia from having the same fate as the other countries of the Arab spring,

This can summarise the path that our party, Ennahdha, Renaissance, has followed since the revolution.

My party was the winner of the first free and fair elections in 2011 after the revolution.

However, Despite being winners, we did not choose to take revenge on those who oppressed us in the past. We also rejected a proposed law to ban members of the former regime from taking part in politics.

This is because we believe that we need to open up a new page in the history of our country, and because we believe that our country must be for all its citizens, and that the ship of Tunisia must carry all its sons and daughters.

When political polarisation created a very dangerous political crisis in the summer of 2013, this threatened to destroy our young democracy,

Through that difficult period, the main concern I had was how to keep our transition to democracy alive and on track because it represented the dream of many generations in our country, and indeed around the region.

What mattered for us was saving our nation's unity and stability.

That is why I accepted the invitation for dialogue from the leader of the opposition then, our current president now, His excellency, Mr Beji Qaid Essebsi.

Through a national dialogue between 17 parties, our party accepted to leave power that we won in free and fair elections, and pass it to a technocratic government. The reward for this big sacrifice was to put our democratic transition back on track, to resume the writing of our democratic constitution, and to open the way for new elections.

Our decision has saved our young democracy, and saved Tunisia from descending into chaos, and from going back to dictatorship. From this platform. I would like to thank the quartet of civil society organisations who oversaw the national dialogue, and whose efforts have been recognised with the Nobel Peace Prize, and I would also like to thank the other participants in the dialogue. I would also like to thank our president Mr Beji Qaid Essebsi, who continues to lead

the process of consensus and compromise in order to preserve national unity and our democratic transition.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Since 2011, Tunisia has had three free and fair, democratic elections.

It has agreed the most progressive Constitution in the Arab world, adopted by a democratically elected parliament,

It has the highest proportion of women in parliament,

It has the rights of its citizens for the freedom of belief, expression, and association guaranteed and protected.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Tunisia still has still a long way to go to achieve prosperity.

We urgently need to create opportunity and hope for our young people.

We need to build infrastructure and provide good services to our people

We need to counter corruption and strengthen our democratic institutions

Citizens, and particularly the youth, in poorer areas must be able to see that democracy can bring a real improvements to their lives.

The Tunisian experiment must succeed, for the sake of our region and the world.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am happy to say that, since the revolution, India's ambassadors in Tunisia have played a positive role in supporting tunisia's democratic transition through different programmes. And I'm also happy to inform you that the first assembly factory for one of India's truck manufacturers in Tunisia opened under our government in 2013.

I would like therefore to take the opportunity to invite your esteemed group, and all of India's companies to come visit Tunisia and explore all the great investment opportunities and potential that it has.

India as the world's largest democracy, and Tunisia as the world's youngest democracy should work closer together.

I finally leave you with this verse from the Quran,

where God tells us that , the destiny of humanity, is get to know each other, to work together for the good of all:

يا أيها الناس, إنا خلقناكم من ذكر وأنثى, وجعلناكم شعوبا وقبائل لتعارفوا, إن أكرمكم عند الله أتقاكم

« O mankind! We have created you male and female,

and have made you nations and tribes,

that you may know one another.

The noblest of you, in the sight of God, is the best in conduct. »

Thank you very much