**Throne Day: US Secretary of Health Praises 'Very Strong Ties' between Morocco and the USA**

The celebration of the 20th anniversary of HM King Mohammed VI's accession to the throne is an opportunity to highlight the "very strong ties" between Morocco and the United States, said, Tuesday in Washington, U.S. secretary of Health and Human Services, Alex Azar.

"We are determined to strengthen this vital link for the future," Azar said at a reception hosted by Morocco’s ambassador to the United States, Lalla Joumala Alaoui, on the occasion of the Throne Day celebration.

"Under the leadership of HM the King, the relationship between our two nations, formally articulated in the 1786 Treaty of Peace and Friendship, has deepened," the US official noted, adding that "our friendship has different aspects, including security cooperation, trade, scientific and cultural exchanges".

This friendship, he went on, "is based on our free trade agreement with Morocco, the only one we have with an African country, which generates countless exchanges, particularly between our cultural and educational institutions".

Every year, Azar said, Morocco also hosts African Lion Operation, "the largest US military exercise in Africa, during which Moroccan and US soldiers train side by side in collaboration with other African and European countries”.

"Morocco remains one of our closest partners in the fight against terrorism," he underlined.

Azar noted that the promotion of stability across the African continent "could not be achieved without more than 2,000 soldiers with whom Morocco has contributed to UN peacekeeping missions in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Southern Sudan".

On the economic front, Azar highlighted the importance of the free trade agreement between Morocco and the United States, noting that trade between the two countries has increased by more than 300% since its entry into force in 2006. In addition, he stressed, "there are more than 150 American companies currently active in Morocco, investing in energy, infrastructure, aviation, pharmaceuticals and environmental technologies.

In her address, Morocco's ambassador to the United States, Lalla Joumala Alaoui, recalled that Throne Day has a strong symbolic significance for Morocco because it "reflects the renewal of the centuries-old bond that unites the throne and the Moroccan people around a common vision of the Kingdom and what it represents: a diverse country, proud of its multi-religious and multi-ethnic heritage, deeply committed to its traditions and specificities, but also invested in building a modern, open, progressive and inclusive nation”.

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