

Brazilian President Ready for 5th African Tour

Contributed by Alexandre Rocha
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Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva will make an official visit to Algeria next month as part of a tour of Africa, which is also going to include Benin, Botswana and South Africa.

This will be the fifth time that president Lula travels to the African continent since the beginning of his term in office, in January 2003, and Algeria will be the sixth Arab country he is going to visit. In December 2003 the Brazilian president visited Lebanon, Syria, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Libya.

"These trips show the importance that Brazil places on the development of relations with Africa and with the Arab countries," said the Algerian ambassador to Brazil, M'hamed Achache. According to a spokesperson for the Presidency, the Brazilian President will be in the Arab country on February 08 and 09.

Lula is going to pay back the visit that his Algerian colleague, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, made to Brazil in May last year. Apart from having co-presided the Summit of South American - Arab Countries, as Algeria was at the time occupying the rotating presidency of the League of Arab States, Bouteflika remained in the country after the event for a state visit to Brazilian capital Brasília and São Paulo, in the southeast of the country.

"Brazil and Algeria are very close with regard to political themes. But apart from that, the countries have similar challenges, the promotion of economic growth with stability while guaranteeing social development," stated ambassador Achache.

They are also close in trade. Algeria is the main Brazilian partner among the Arab countries with regard to bilateral trade, which is the total of exports and imports. In 2005, the African country exported the equivalent to US\$ 2.8 billion to Brazil, an increase of 46% in comparison to the previous year. The main product in the trade basket is oil.

Brazil, in turn, sold the equivalent to US\$ 384.3 million, a growth of over 10% when compared to 2004. The main products shipped to the Algerian market were sugar, cattle beef, soy oil, vehicles and powdered milk. Algeria is by far the main Brazilian supplier among the Arab countries and the fifth main destination for Brazilian exports in the region.

President Lula's visit is going to take place little after a trade mission, led by the country minister of Development, Industry and Foreign Trade, Luiz Fernando Furlan, to the Arab country. In November 2005, Furlan travelled to Algeria accompanied by representatives from almost 50 companies.

During his trip, president Lula is going to meet with Bouteflika and, according to Achache, agreements should be signed. The agenda has not yet been closed, according to him, but agreements should be signed regarding maritime transport, trade and cooperation in the agricultural, health and animal sanitation areas.

Growth

Located in the north of Africa, Algeria is the second largest country on the continent, losing only to Sudan. The country has a shoreline on the Mediterranean and has in oil its largest source of income. With the strong growth in the price of the commodity, the volume of funds for investment in the country has also risen. The Algerian government intends to invest US\$ 60 billion in sectors considered essential over the next five years.

And this process has already started generating business for Brazilian companies. Construction company Andrade Gutierrez has just won a tender for the construction of a dam in the northeastern region of the country, works estimated at 25 million euros, and is participating in another two tenders.

Companies in the vehicle sector, like Randon and Neobus, have established partnerships with local companies to produce and sell on the regional market and in Europe, as Algeria has a trade agreement with the European Union.

Apart from the extraction of oil, other important industries in Algeria, which has a population of 33.4 million inhabitants, are the petrochemical, food and machinery.

Culture

Before the visit by president Lula, Algeria is going to host a meeting of minister of Culture of Arab and South American countries between February 2 and 3. This is one of the meetings to proceed with the talks begun at the summit in Brasília.

"The Brasília summit scheduled this meeting," stated Anuar Nahes, of the undersecretary-general of policy at the Brazilian Foreign Office (Itamaraty), who is responsible for the organization of the Brazilian delegation.

Among the topics to be discussed are exchange of participation in culture festivals, support to production of films on both sides, the organization of an annual Arab and South American music meeting in Tunis, the organization of an Arab and South American poetry festival in Algiers, the organization of culture fairs with the objective of promoting the Algerian capital as the Arab Cultural Capital 2007, the creation of a mutual award for cultural thought and creation, the establishment in Morocco of a research center about South America, and the creation of an Arab-South American library - which Algeria has already offered to host.

Apart from the creation of the library, another topic of special interest to Brazil, according to Nahes, is the organization of exhibition "History of two rivers: the Amazon and the Nile".

The project was idealized by the Emílio Goeldi Museum, from the city of Belém, capital of the northern Brazilian state of Pará, and has the objective of showing environmental and human characteristics surrounding the two largest rivers in the world (Amazon and Nile), located in Brazil and Egypt.

The execution of the project would be in the hands of the museum from Pará, which is connected to the Ministry of Science and Technology, and of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

Another theme of special interest to Brazil is the protection of historical and cultural assets. "We have much to learn about the Arab nations in this area," stated Nahes. One more matter of great interest to Brazil is South American film participation in Carthage Film Festival, to take place in Tunisia this year.

The Brazilian delegation at the event will be led by the executive secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Juca Ferreira, and will also count on the secretary of cultural policies at the ministry, Sérgio Sá Leitão, on professor Paulo Farah, from the University of São Paulo (USP), as well as representatives from the Institute for National Artistic and Historical Heritage (Iphan), from the Itamaraty - Nahes himself - and of Emílio Goeldi Museum.

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