



Human Rights under the Democratic Changes and Equitable Development: Lessons of the Popular Tunisian Revolution and the Responsibilities of the Arab Civil Society

As an initiative of the Arab Institute for Human Rights and the Arab NGO Network for Development, a regional symposium was held on the 1st and the 2nd of march 2011, regarding “Human Rights under the Democratic Changes and Equitable Development: Questions and Prospects in the Light of the Popular Revolution Model in Tunisia and Egypt”. This came in the context of the radical unprecedented transformations that the Arab region is witnessing and that lead to important changes in the authorities and opened the path for the outbreak of a third revolution in Libya where the arrogant and violent regime caused thousands of victims so far.

The time has come for dismantling the state that always seeks gains. This state was nothing but the outcome of a succession of failed development policies. Its tyranny provided the opportunity for minorities in the country to control the state instruments, monopolize the national wealth and public affairs, surpassing the limits of corruption and its traditional mechanisms and drawing a new style of violent and complex regime.

Due to these important revolutions, the Arab world has entered into a historic turning point and practically launched a foundation phase towards civil and democratic states that respect liberties, law, human rights and equality. In order to protect this democratic movement from any relapse and to steer it towards the completion of Arab people demands, we must consider the five following principles:

1) **Responsibilities in the current phase:** Building a civil state: The state of rights and law. This historic phase imposes on the different parties, civil society organizations, revolutionary activists and citizens to rise to the level of national responsibility, to be aware of the fast changes that are occurring and develop visions and missions for the future by avoiding the reproduction of the previous phase concepts. The Arab world is not only about to change regimes, but it also wants to rebuild its independence on new basis different from the previous phase that witnessed the violation of independence and all domination aspects in direct and indirect mechanisms. Therefore, the transition will definitely be affected by the specificities of each country and this explains the variety of possibilities and scenarios, but the most important is to continue the struggle to achieve liberty, protect and maintain the change path confidently. Revolution is the result of accumulations of the struggles of various community groups, and this explains the importance of organizing the

various community forces in order to build new coordinating powers. Change can only come from the inside, but the challenge remains in fortifying the quick changes in order to build a civil state based on rights, law and citizenship. The current period requires practical mechanisms to ensure the transition to the stage of strengthening the revolutionary legitimacy with a constitutional legitimacy that protects it from slipping back into a new dictatorship hiding behind talks on behalf of the people and the revolution.

There is an urgent need for a national dialogue to reach a new social contract that supports the comprehensive approach to the process of reform, and that through linking the political reform with economic, social and cultural human rights-based reforms.

2) The central role of human rights in rebuilding the political, economic, social and cultural system: At this important historical stage, Arab human rights organizations stress their commitment to the principles and values of human rights and consider that they are facing an unprecedented opportunity to make fundamental institutional legislative changes, which requires doubling their efforts and reviewing their strategies and tools in order to place human rights at the core of the stages of democratic transition by consecrating equality and ending discrimination in all legal provisions and national legislations. Transparency through all phases of democratic change and reconstruction is the basis of building confidence between the citizen and the coming governance. Moreover, the transition to a democratic system requires the respect of pluralism and the review of laws on political parties; the adoption of a voting system that considers the different society parties and strengthens the competition between them; the development of mechanisms for the peaceful and democratic change of powers; ensuring the independence of the judiciary system; the sound functioning of constitutional institutions and activating the supervisory role of the citizens. All these conditions are necessary to guaranty the transition process into a democratic system. The Arab human rights movement is also invited to consider human rights and democracy as the heart of regional and international talks as a necessary step towards the construction of a new regional and international system.

3) Inseparability of freedom and development justice demands: Development justice is a key part in the course of Arab revolutions because it correlates with the demands of freedom and development to build an economic and social system based on dignity, liberty and equity, and this was the main demand of protesters in the entire region and what lead them to this profound change. The revolution gains are not completed with the continuing phenomena of poverty, rooted differences and youth deprivation from their right to work and keeping them out of the production cycle. Justice in development is an essential aspect of the democratic process and a condition for its protection. It requires transparency and accountability in governance, and decentralising governance by encouraging local, rural and regional democracies and adopting

development policies that enable all people to participate and benefit of these policies

4) Roles of civil society organizations: Civil society organizations need to contribute in the provision of alternatives in the political, economic, social and cultural areas, and this can only be achieved when these organizations maintain their nature and independence and refuse to be employed by competing political forces. They are also invited to move from opposition organizations to become a power that makes suggestions and contributes positively to deepen the political discussions. Human rights movement is currently facing new challenges such as how to develop mechanisms to contribute in monitoring the transitional governments and warn about the dangers of violating human rights. This is why the movement should be in the heart of the change by proposing transition from the awareness role to the role of elaborating alternative development policies and preventing the marginalization of main parties' rights or postponing the study of central issues such as women, youth and marginalized groups in society. One of the urgent issues in this context is the development of new democratic legislations that ensure the freedom of forming civil society organizations away from the constraints of the previous phase that hindered the growth of civil society and prevented it of its natural growth and put it under the state mechanisms monopolizing public space. In order to achieve this, it will be necessary to guarantee the right of access to information to enable civil society to develop alternatives based on scientific and objective assessment of reality.

5) Regional solidarity to protect change: Civil society organizations in all Arab countries are invited to take practical steps in solidarity with the transformations occurring in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya in order to protect them from any kind of external intervention, especially the military one, in addition to the intervention of Arab regimes scared of being affected by the change. This requires the development of cooperation and solidarity between the various civil society organizations in the Arab world and addressing attempts to re-impose economic, social and cultural policies that lead to the crisis and the explosion of the situation.

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