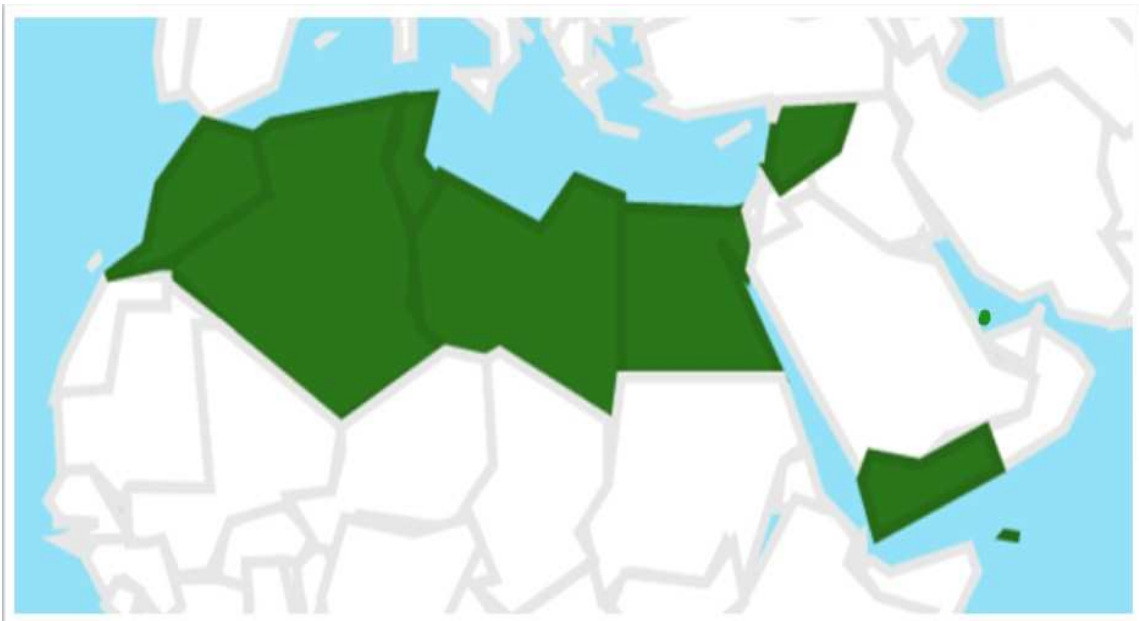




International Alliance of Women
Alliance Internationale des Femmes

Wishes, Demands and Priorities of National and Regional Women's Organisations in the MENA Region.



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I. Introduction

Women alongside men participated in the protest movements in the Arab world in 2011. From Tunisia to Bahrain, from Egypt to Syria women from all backgrounds demanded freedom, equality, dignity, justice and democracy. Did we hear them and listen to them?

The Arab Spring was at its core a non-religious, socio-political event led by young people unable to realise their full potential, lacking job opportunities and freedom. After the revolutions women have been told “to go back home”. Women are now confronting attempts to exclude them from public life, and violence is perpetrated with impunity by extremist groups and security forces. It is vital that steps are taken to establish equal rights between men and women as the foundation of democracy. As expressed by many women and women’s organisations of the Middle East and Northern African (MENA) region: there cannot be real democracy without the full and equal participation of women and men. Therefore we urge the International Community to continue to listen to these women and support their demands.¹

And in nearly each country women’s participation in parliament and government has dropped although more women are well and higher educated than men. Women were included during the revolutions in the fight for freedom, for dignity and equality, why should they be excluded from the subsequent democratic processes?

The Tunisian General of FIDH says: “women played an important role in the resistance to the dictatorship before and during the revolution. Along with the women’s associations, we are demanding equality with the knowledge that we won’t achieve it immediately. Obviously, not all parties are on the same wavelength on the issue of full legal equality. Clearly women have to fight again, like always. Women have to fight, because many societies remain patriarchal despite everything – the laws are unequal and the practices are too. And as always, women have to fight two – three – times as hard to ensure their place in society. But one thing is clear: they are keeping up the fight to ensure their full participation in the transition process and thereafter.” Does the International Community hear this message?

Women’s equal participation in political and public life remains an essential condition for democracy and social justice and are values at the heart of the Arab spring. These values are shared by the International community and constitute the basis of the Council of Europe’s policies. The present transition period is decisive for women’s human rights and thus for democracy. This report serves to give a voice to the women in the MENA region.

Encouraged by the IFDH report (see footnote) which focuses on the legal situation of women in 8 Arab countries, this report lists for the same 8 countries the wishes, demands and priorities as formulated by National and Regional Women’s Organisations in those 8 countries.

Therefore let us listen to women’s wishes, demands and priorities, and work towards their realization.

¹ Quoted from the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) recent report “Women and the Arab Spring”, available at: < http://arabwomenspring.fidh.net/index.php?title=Main_Page>

II. National Organisations

MOROCCO

In 2011 the wave of demonstrations throughout the Arab region also reached Morocco, where protest groups and civil society organisations pushed for democratic reform, social justice and the protection of women's rights. Women were at the forefront of these demonstrations, including as spokespersons for the movement. As a result Morocco adopted in July 2011 a new constitution, which enshrined the principle of equality between men and women and contains provisions on increasing women's participation in decision-making bodies.



Moroccan laws are mainly based on French and Islamic law (Sharia). Matters related to personal status of the Muslim community (including inheritance, marriage, divorce and child custody) are governed by the Moudawana, the family code, which is based on Islamic law. The Christian and Jewish communities in Moroccan society have separate family laws. Thus, there is no unified personal status law that applies to all Moroccans. In 2004 the code was reformed and the new Moudawana is considered one of the most progressive in the Arab world.² And while the previous constitution did not include such a provision, the new draft constitution of July 2011 guarantees women's "civic and social" equality with men.

Morocco acceded to the CEDAW in 1993, with reservations to article 29 (1), and a declaration to article 2, stating that the government of Morocco is ready to apply the provisions of the article as long as these do not conflict with Islamic law.³ The CEDAW Committee has however indicated that article 2 is central to the purpose and objective of the convention. On 8 April 2011, the Moroccan government withdrew its reservations to the Convention, yet the declarations have still not yet been removed.

The new Ministry of Solidarity, Women, Family and Social Development is responsible for promoting and protecting women's rights. The Ministry has developed a national strategy for gender equality and equity. The aim is to integrate a gender approach into all development policies and programmes. One of the ministry's main priorities is to ensure a collaborative approach on gender equality between ministerial departments, NGOs and other organisations. A Committee for Gender Cooperation has also been established. Morocco has an active women's rights movement.

The efforts of civil society organisations in promoting and protecting women's rights in Morocco have had a significant impact. The women's rights movement advocated for quotas for women in decision-making bodies and was very active in the reform of the

² For example, the new code introduces modifications to the rules of inheritance, raises the minimum age of marriage and secures women's right to divorce.

³ In April 2011 Morocco withdrew its reservations to articles 9 (2) (equal rights with regard to nationality) and 16 (equality in marriage and family life).

family law. Although Morocco has taken important steps in ensuring equal rights for women, women's organisations emphasize the need for further developments.

Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM)⁴

The ADFM is a well established organisation and has been consulted by the government reform process in Morocco. The ADFM assigns itself the mission of protection and promotion of women's human rights as universally recognized. Its principal objective is the promotion of women's rights and strategic interests at the political level, and the recognition of their rights and dignity at the global and sectoral political level. The ADFM aims at De facto and De jure gender equality, by defending and promoting women's fundamental human rights. Through its mission, the ADFM attempts to establish a more democratic society. Most of their recommendations were included in the new 2011 Constitution.

The ADFM also produces NGO shadow Reports to CEDAW. It has also recently produced for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights a 10 page report on Moroccan women's rights with clear recommendations and priorities.

WISHES, DEMANDS AND PRIORITIES OF ADFM

- Harmonise national legislation with the Constitution and with the International instruments related to Human rights.
- Implement the Governmental Equality Agenda 2011-2015 with its 30 objectives. It focuses on the need to review the family code, discriminatory laws on economic, social and cultural rights and finally on combating gender based violence.
- The installation of effective national institutional mechanisms of execution and follow up of Human Rights and Women's Rights.
- The implementation of equal civil, political, socioeconomic and cultural rights.
- Equality in the work place, including women's access to decision making positions.
- Protection of women against all forms of violence.
- All proposed and agreed should take gender equality into account and should be implemented by executive powers and social actors.
- The adoption and implementation of strategies that promote women's status.
- Adoption of measures resulting decrease of the gender gap.
- The establishment of a non-patriarchal culture that bans sexist attitudes and behaviours.

Feminist Spring for Equality and Democracy (coalition of over 30 associations)

The ADFM is a member of the Feminist Spring for Democracy and Equality Coalition (hereafter: the Coalition). This Feminist Movement stands up for the constitutional reform in Morocco. The Coalition is composed of many components of the Feminist Movement in Morocco. Created on Wednesday, March 16th, 2011 in Rabat, the coalition aims to establish equal rights between women and men in civil, political, economic, social and cultural life.

To achieve this goal, the Coalition drew up a memorandum reflecting the feminist movement vision of the new Constitution that Moroccan women aspire to in the twenty-first century. In Morocco the marches of the newly formed Coalition, demanding that

⁴ www.adfm.ma

equality between women and men be enshrined in the constitution, were successful and the July 2011 constitution does include non-discrimination as the principle of the constitution and equality.

The Coalition calls on the Ministry of Solidarity, Women, Family and Social Development for legislative and institutional measures, in order to protect women and girls against discrimination and violence, particularly in the case of marriage of minors. The Coalition also calls on the implementation of the provisions of the Constitution, such as those on violence against women. Violence against women is still widespread as evidenced by data collected by associations and networks of women in Morocco and confirmed by the Moroccan High Commission for Planning (HCP) in 2011.⁵

The Coalition finds its aspirations as a feminist association reflected in the guidelines of the Constitution, which guarantees the dignity of women and their protection against all forms of discrimination and violence.

WISHES, DEMANDS AND PRIORITIES OF THE COALITION

1. Adoption by the Ministry of a participatory approach with civil society in the development and monitoring of national strategies and international commitments of Morocco concerning the advancement of women.
2. Clarification by the Ministry of the program in the fight against violence against women.
3. The immediate installation of the Authority for Equality and the fight against all forms of discrimination provided by the Moroccan constitution.
4. The overhaul of the penal code to ensure the protection of women against all forms of discrimination and violence.
5. The enactment of a framework approach based on law, providing mechanisms for prevention, protection and redress for female victims of violence.
6. Withdrawal of declarations to CEDAW.

Association Voix de Femmes Marocaines⁶

The AVFM is a non-profit organization, national in scope, which works in the field of women's rights and children's rights.

The AVFM bases its strategy on two main areas:

- Socio-educational: providing outreach services to various female social groups and the general public through various actions and activities of associations and centres of the association.
- Political awareness, mobilization of women and the general public, advocacy and lobbying for the implementation of equality between men and women and ensuring their legal, economic, social and political rights.

The AVFM calls upon the Moroccan government to assist the organisation in achieving its objectives.

⁵ See < <http://www.unwomen.org/2011/01/moroccan-government-releases-extensive-gender-based-violence-study/>>

⁶ <http://www.avfma.org>

WISHES, DEMANDS AND PRIORITIES OF AVFM

- Defending the rights of women.
- Promoting the revision of discriminatory legislation against women (the Moroccan family code) by referring to the principle of equality enshrined in the international conventions.
- Fighting against illiteracy among women and encourage enrolment in education of girls particularly in rural areas.
- Fighting any kind of discrimination against women and propagate egalitarian and emancipated thinking by promoting a culture based on associative values of equality and human rights principles.
- Pursuing the establishment of equality between the sexes in all areas; social, economic, cultural, legal and political.
- Assisting women to organize themselves into socio-economic cooperatives, associations and so on.
- Developing income-generating projects for women and girls in vulnerable situations.
- Supporting the implementation of development projects for women.
- Supporting and rendering justice for female victims of violence.
- Organizing awareness campaigns (conferences round tables, seminars and training at universities).
- Intervening with officials and concerned parties to protect and guarantee the rights of women and the human rights in general.

ALGERIA

In January 2011, Algerian women organized campaigns and participated side-by-side with men in demonstrations demanding democratic reform and the end of the regime. Women were among those arrested and beaten by police, and several women activists were specifically targeted by the authorities. Unfortunately the demonstrations did not lead to the yearned for result.



In spite of more campaigns to withdraw existing repressive laws restricting freedom and civil liberties, and in spite of protests to prevent the Algerian government to further restrict civil liberties, a new law on association, political parties and information was adopted by parliament in January 2012, prescribing new restrictions to civil liberties, such as receiving foreign funding,

Laws in Algeria are based both on French and Islamic law (Sharia). The Ministry for the Family and the Status of Women is the main governmental organisation responsible for promoting and protecting the rights of women in Algeria.

Despite the progress made in reforming discriminatory laws the Algerian family code continues to contain provisions based on Islamic Law that causes inequality between women and men.

In 1996 Algeria acceded to CEDAW with reservations. These reservations are incompatible with the main purpose of the Convention and therefore impermissible according to the CEDAW Committee.⁷

National Women's Council

Following Algeria's accession to CEDAW in 1996 the National Women's Council was established officially as an advisory body by the government. It is headed by the Minister responsible for national solidarity and the family and reports directly to the Head of Government.

The National Women's Council's membership includes, next to women representatives from a number of government agencies, also representatives from the Women's Social Movement and women with expertise in specific subjects.

The National Women's Council's main task was to follow up the recommendations of the Beijing Platform for Action agreed on at the 4th Women World Conference in 1995 and to formulate appropriate proposals for the advancement of Algerian women in all areas.

⁷ Articles 2 (policy measures), 15 (4) (freedom to choose residence and domicile), 16 (equality in marriage and family life) and 29 (related to the administration of the convention; arbitration in the event of a dispute). Following the amendment of the nationality code in 2005, the government of Algeria withdrew its reservation to article 9 (2) (equal rights with regard to nationality) in 2009.

Although subsequently some laws were changed and the situation of women improved, discrimination remains large. Women's organizations are dissatisfied and maintain, supported by CEDAW's recent reports that much work remains to be done.

Rally against Hogra⁸ and for Algerian women's rights (RACHDA)⁹

RACHDA is a national association established during the National Assembly of the RCD party by its women members in January 1996, with the objective to get the subject of women's rights on the political agenda. The RCD is the Rally for Culture and Democracy, a political party promoting secularism.

It runs sections in 20 wilayas (provinces) throughout Algeria and has acquired experience and has been successful in mobilizing women to claim their rights.

Whereas the association was initially created within one political party (RCD), today its principle is to be independent of the RCD and other political parties and to avoid party politics. Nevertheless RACHDA benefits from the political experience of its women activists, as they originated from women's movements and political parties advocating for democracy and equality. They bring with them experience of strategies how to get the attention of politicians for their subject.

Main Objective

RACHDA aims at defending the rights of women wishing to live in a democratic society with equality, justice and dignity by advocating political measures and strategies.

WISHES, DEMANDS AND PRIORITIES OF RACHDA

- To defend the rights of women to live in a democratic society with equality, justice and dignity.
- to ensure de facto equality between women and men of their rights and responsibilities
- to withdraw all laws discriminatory towards women
- to withdraw all anti-constitutional laws
- To abolish all discriminatory practices towards women.
- to change the present family code, which they consider a contradiction to basic democratic values
- to develop activities to assist women living in poverty
- to promote awareness of and solidarity with women living in poverty
- To develop activities and solidarity to assist victims of fundamentalist terrorism.

Association Culturelle AMUSNAW¹⁰

The association, founded in 1991, based in Tizi-Ouzou in Kabylia, initially organized and promoted cultural activities. Since then, it has endeavored to fulfill other needs of the population, especially those of women and youth.

⁸ Hogra means despise against women.

⁹ <http://www.nodo50.org/mujeresred/RACHDA.html>

¹⁰ <http://amusnaw.org/>

AMUSNAW is convinced that participation of women in public and political life is a guarantee for the strengthening of democracy and citizenship and that the involvement of civil society will in the end lead to the establishment of the rule of law.

The association is strongly committed to advocate improved conditions for women and has developed expertise in this area.

AMUSNAW has developed a training program designed to improve women's leadership in civil society (within associations, organizations, trade unions and political parties).

Sensitive to the vulnerable situation of women and children as victims of violence, the association offers psychological and legal assistance. This helps to remove taboos surrounding sensitive subjects such as incest or rape and making authorities and society aware of the vulnerable situation of women and children.

In the same way, a support program has been developed for single mothers, widows and divorcees who remain the primary caretaker for the children.

WISHES, DEMANDS AND PRIORITIES OF AMUSNAW

The Association wishes Algeria to develop into a country, where:

- The rule of law is based on secularism and democracy
- Individual and collective freedoms are respected,
- The cultural and linguistic diversity is recognized
- Equitable access to social and economic rights is guaranteed for all men and women through the establishment of equality in civil laws.

The Association calls upon the Algerian government to ensure this development.

AMUSNAW prepared in 2012 a shadow report for the CEDAW Committee with the following 12 recommendations.

1. To invite Algeria to withdraw its reservations on the Convention.
2. To continue the reform of the family code to remove the tutelage of women at marriage, to establish shared parental authority over the children and perfect equality in terms of divorce and inheritance.
3. To ensure the strict enforcement of the organic law on the participation of women in public life during the next elections.
4. To introduce sexual harassment as a serious offence in labor laws, to guarantee the protection of the victim and to encourage formal complaints through the protection of victims and witnesses.
5. To put into practice a national policy on gender creating a general framework for sector policies and programs.
6. To put into practice a national plan to fight stereotypes in all sectors of society.
7. To carry out awareness campaigns to give effect to the reforms in terms of the protection of the equality between men and women.
8. To do research on the implementation of the 2005 family code.
9. To launch a national survey on violence against women including all public sectors, security services and civil society.
10. To pass an outline law (including all sectors) to stop violence against women as an attack to the dignity of the person.

11. To invite the Government to ratify the International Convention on the protection of the rights of migrant workers and members of their families.
12. To invite the Government to ratify the additional protocol of the International Convention against all forms of discrimination against women.

TUNISIA

The Yasmine Revolution in the Arab world started in Tunisia in December 2010 and spread from Tunisia to other Arab countries. Under the slogan of “Dignity, Liberty and Equality” it led to the fall of President Ben Ali’s regime in January 2011. Tunisian women participated in great numbers with men in the protests demanding democratic change and during the transition period women continued to advocate and demonstrate for full participation in the democratic process leading up to the election of a new parliament in October 2011.



The demand by Tunisian Women’s organisations to lift reservations to CEDAW was met with the immediate announcement by the interim government in August 2011 that this was agreed on; however it has not yet been formally registered with the U.N.

Thanks to the Women’s lobby the electoral law included the requirement of parity with the alternation of female and male candidates on each list. The Islamist Ennadha Party won the October 2011 elections but thereafter maintained in official statements their commitment to women’s rights. Nevertheless Tunisian women are concerned that even though the Tunisian President said repeatedly - most recently in his address to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe - that he will respect women’s equal rights, he might not be able to stand up against more conservative elements within his own party and within the more extremist Salafist party. Those conservative elements have put women’s equal rights into question, and called, amongst others, for the separation of the sexes in public spaces, and for women to be veiled.

Literacy rates are high in Tunisia and women form the majority among higher and university educated. Although women’s participation in the labour market is relatively high compared with other Arab countries, women demand more and equal opportunities in the economic area.

Tunisian Association of Women Democrats (Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates - ATFD)¹¹

The original initiative takers had to overcome obstacles and resistance from political powers to finally found in 1989 the Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates as a legally recognised organisation. The organisation was already active within the resistance movement during Ben Ali’s regime. It played a prominent role in the January 14th 2011 revolution for which it received in 2012 the Simone de Beauvoir award for the freedom of women.

It is a member of the Fédération Internationale des Droits de L’homme (FIDH). It cooperates with le Conseil national pour les libertés en Tunisie, with l’Association des femmes tunisiennes pour la recherche et le développement and with le Syndicat national des journalistes tunisien.

¹¹ <http://femmesdemocrates.org/>

Principles and main objectives of ATFD

Since 1989 ATFD has developed into a feminist association faithful to its founding principles of autonomy, plurality and solidarity.

ATFD fights for gender equality, democracy, secularism and social justice.

WISHES, DEMANDS AND PRIORITIES OF ATFD

- To advocate for gender equality, democracy, secularism and social justice.
- To defend the rights of women
- To acquire full and equal citizenship for women
- To promote gender equality in the civil, political, social, economic and cultural sectors.
- To promote women's equal representation and participation in all areas of society
- To fight against all forms of discrimination and violence against women
- To fight all manifestations of patriarchal dominance
- To make as many people as possible aware of the need to improve the present situation of women, and for women to acquire equal participation representation in all areas of society.

Tunisian Women's Association for Research and Development (Association des Femmes Tunisiennes pour la Recherche et le Développement - AFTURD)

Officially created in January 1989, following discussions which started in 1986 with the objective to create an autonomous movement of Tunisian women, AFTURD was initially the national section of the Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD) before becoming a national non-governmental organization in its own right.

AFTURD is affiliated with the larger women's research network, Association des Femmes Africaines pour la Recherche et le Développement (AFARD), which was also formalized in 1989.

AFTURD brings women trained in research and in militant action together.

Proactive on national, regional, and international levels, AFTURD participates in networks of exchange among women in the Arab and African region.

AFTURD sponsors forums on key women's issues, where ongoing research is presented and vigorously debated with the objective to develop culturally appropriate solutions to discrimination against women.

In addition to networking, AFTURD scholars have produced important qualitative and quantitative research on the status of Tunisian women, including the two-volume *Tunisiennes en devenir* (Tunisian Women on the Move). They have developed basic, accessible guides to women's legal rights and obligations (*La marriage* and *Le divorce*).

Also engaged in activism to achieve effective emancipation for women, AFTURD participates in projects such as the Espace Tanassof, a women's shelter offering information, legal and psychological counselling, and training on specific themes concerning gendered approaches to social issues.

WISHES, DEMANDS AND PRIORITIES OF AFTURD

- To promote debates and research on the situation of women
- To identify all obstacles, which limit the effective participation of women in economic and public life, be these legislative, institutional or cultural
- To do research on the integration of women in the development process.
- To encourage conscious and critical participation of women in decision making, particularly at the formulation and realisation of development projects and its priorities
- To promote research how to effectively emancipate Tunisian women and how to safeguard their rights.
- To emphasize the positive role of women within the cultural, social and economic development process, and to restore their disregarded role within history.
- To create and develop communication and exchange networks between Tunisian women, between Tunisian and African women, as well as between Tunisian women and every individual, group or institution concerned with development problems in Tunisia, Africa or elsewhere.

WISHES, DEMANDS AND PRIORITIES AFTER THE ARAB REVOLUTION OF ATFD, AFTURD, COLLECTIF 95 MAGREB EGALITÉ

The Tunisian Association of Women Democrats (ATFD), together with the Tunisian Women's Association for Research and Development and the Collectif 95 Magreb Egalité formulated the following demands:

1. The principle of equality and non-discrimination must be included in the constitution
2. Parity for men and women in politics must be embedded in the new constitution and in the new to be appointed regional commissions as well as in the judiciary .
3. International conventions must be implementation
4. The withdrawal of reservations to CEDAW must be formalised and be translated into national legislation;
5. Women and men must have full equality in rights and duties in the political, economic, social, cultural and environmental areas
6. Women must benefit equally with men from economic development, job training, leadership training and empowerment
7. Equality in inheritance must be written into new laws

Association Lam Echaml¹²

Lam Echaml is a platform of sixty associations of civil society and many individual citizens working together to create tomorrow's modern and democratic Tunisian republic.

Lam Echaml initiative takers noticed that when the dictatorial regime ended on 14th January 2011, a suffocated civil society finally breathes the air of freedom. Flowering associations, initiatives and groups emerged, each providing building blocks for the future Tunisia. However civil society seemed to suffer from its dispersion and its breakdown. This is why the initiative LAM ECHAML called for uniting all democratic and progressive initiatives which include republican and basic democratic values.

¹² <http://www.lamechaml.org/>

Lam Echaml was set up to provide a platform for associations and individuals to meet, exchange experiences and work together, thus coordinating and enhancing the activities of each of its participants.

" Lam Echaml "considers that the universal values contained in the international framework of human rights, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women comprise the values that inspires the platform in all its positions and actions.

WISHES, DEMANDS AND PRIORITIES OF LAM ECHAML

The associations, initiatives, informal groups and independent citizens who were involved in Tunis on 29 April 2011 at the establishment of the "Lam Echaml" association aspire to put an end to the dispersed forces and dynamics, and to affirm their unwavering commitment to a constant upholding of its principles, as a minimum platform of cooperation:

- The republican regime and its values of secularism.
- Respect for individual and public freedoms.
- Full equality between women and men.
- The separation between religion and state, an essential guarantee for a democratic society respecting the right to differ and freedom of conscience.
- The attachment to the culture and civilization of our country.

LIBYA

The 17 February 2011 Libyan revolution culminated in November 2011 with the end of Muammar Al-Qaddafi's 42 year rule.

Libyan women participated massively in the 17 February revolution for equality, justice and democracy and the struggle to overthrow the regime. Women were communicating information from one town to another, smuggling weapons, organising relief and support for families and the injured. Some women took up arms and fought alongside men.



Nevertheless, the National Transitional Council (NTC) failed to take measures to ensure equal rights and frustrated equal participation and representation for women in society. The draft constitutional charter adopted in August 2011 contains no provision for prohibiting discrimination against women, there are no measures in the electoral law adopted in January 2012 to ensure the representation of women in the new parliament and the 28-member cabinet appointed by the NTC includes only 2 women. Moreover, there is no basis for the NTC excuse claiming a shortage of suitable women candidates, since the majority (60%) of higher educated and university graduates are women.

Women's organisations are calling upon the NTC to protect and implement human and civil rights and focus on redressing the lack of opportunities for women to participate in the public domain, which remains one of the most challenging aspects facing the future of Libya. Libyan women also continue to actively advocate for the equal inclusion of women within the political, social and economical sectors of society.

Libya Women's Platform for Peace (LWPF)

The Libya Women's Platform for peace has been set up in 2011 by Salwa Saad Bugaighisa with the support of Karama. It is a movement of women's organisations and leaders who aim at achieving freedom, equality, social justice and promoting women's rights. They believe that the full participation of women at all levels of the decision-making process is crucial to ensure that Libya's transition period proceeds smoothly and reflects the desires, ambitions and sacrifices of all elements of Libyan society.

LWPF's first demand was a 40% quota in electoral law, in no circumstances less than 30%.

It trained female leaders to design key reforms that protect women in the new constitution.

It trained women and youth activists in advanced techniques for rehabilitating GBV victims.

Wishes, Demands and Priorities of LWPF

In October 2011 LWPF formulated the following 6 point-recommendations:

- Develop a sustainable and integrated strategy capable of achieving cultural and social advancement on issues affecting women and empowering women to develop their awareness of their rights and capabilities.
- Set a quota system that would ensure women's representation by no less than 40% in the General National Congress.
- Reaffirm the right to equality between women and men by highlighting the actual roles and prepare leaderships, enacting legislation, and taking the necessary measures to guarantee and protect women rights along with guaranteeing its protection through the Constitution.
- Promote women's awareness of their rights through the available media channels and communication networks to spread awareness of women rights and demands and maintain their gains.
- Work to establish a lobbying strength to affect decision makers in supporting women's rights and participation.
- Strengthening the presence and effectiveness of the Libya Women Platform for Peace through networking with local civil society organizations at the local, regional and international levels and establishing strong partnerships with them.

The Platform has also discussed the psychological and socio-economic impact of gender based violence (GBV) and how to support the survivors, particularly those of rape during and after conflict. As a result a workplan has been developed with the following goals, priorities, activities and monitoring tools.

Wishes, Demands and Priorities of LWPF on Violence against Women

1. Awareness raising campaigns on the seriousness and the effects of gender based violence (GVB) through civil society organizations and individuals and how victims should be assisted, taking into consideration the principles of privacy, confidentiality and human rights.
2. Providing logistical and financial support to organisations that offer specialized support and psycho-logical treatment for victims of rape, and other forms of GVB, including shelter and rehabilitation facilities..
3. Providing training for service-providers and care-takers of GVB victims, to develop their professional capacities.
4. Providing a hotline service and training employees on how to receive such calls and how to forward these to the appropriate organizations and authorities
5. Develop laws to ensure the protection of vulnerable groups of children, women and men.
6. Raising the awareness of women of their legal rights through awareness-raising campaigns and the eradication of legal illiteracy
7. Lobbying for the inclusion of human rights principles in the educational curriculum of the different schooling phases.

Women4Libya (Steering group of Libyan Civil Society Organisation)¹³

Women4Libya (W4L) is a new initiative of the Libyan Civil Society Organisation, realising that the transition period provided opportunities as well as challenges for women.

¹³ <http://www.women4libya.org/>

W4L believes that the lack of opportunities for Libyan women in the public domain remains one of the most challenging aspects facing the future of a new Libya. To exclude women in the national reconciliation and rebuilding process is to exclude a vital force in the reconstruction of a stable, representative and democratic Libya. W4L developed plans to empower and emancipate women, based on a consultative process that includes all women from the grassroots to the Diaspora.¹⁴

Its objective is to promote the equal inclusion of women within the political, social and economic sectors of society. Its members do very concrete and practical work such as identifying female candidates for prominent positions, equip women with the tools necessary to become leaders; they also work at community and local level.

Wishes, Demands and Priorities of Women4Libya

- To advocate for the representation of women across all sectors of the political and public arena and to ensure equal opportunities for participation and decision-making.
- To ensure the participation of qualified gender sensitive experts in the Constitutional Committee.
- To identify potential female candidates for various prominent positions.
- To support national women NGOs and establish a durable collaboration to ensure successful future endeavors.
- To equip women with the tools and resources they need to become agents and leaders of social change and to promote social justice.
- To support the development of a chain of women centre's within all the cities of Libya.

Voice of Libyan Women (VLW)¹⁵

The Voice of Libyan Women (VLW) was founded in August 2011 after the overthrow of the Qaddafi regime renewing not only the hope for equality in Libya, but also renewing the hope for all Libyan citizens to be able to exercise their basic human rights, including women's rights. This hope quickly translated into action, which VLW believes is the best method for any concrete improvement of women's rights.

VLW has grown considerably since its founding. Nevertheless it remains a youth-led organization with a strong base in their hometown of Zawia. As a group of young Libyan women from different backgrounds, their ultimate goal is to advocate for an increased investment into one of Libya's greatest resources which it says has yet to receive the attention it deserves: women.

VLW focuses its activities on improving the political participation, the economic empowerment of women and the elimination of all forms of violence against women.

Wishes, Demands and Priorities of VLW

- To include in the constitutional charter the prohibition of all forms of discrimination against women.

¹⁴ See: <<http://libyacso.org/>>

¹⁵ <http://www.vlwlibya.org/>

- That the National Transitional Council appoint more women in the 28 member cabinet (only 2 women were appointed)
- To set a minimum quota of 40 % in electoral law, to ensure women's representation in parliament.
- To promote accountability for perpetrators of sexual violence.
- To support rehabilitation services for victims of rape during and after the conflict.
- To lift reservations on CEDAW, which are based on Sharia law.
- To change the injustices in family law, regarding marriage, custody of children, nationality, inheritance and those in criminal laws.
- To lift the criminalisation of abortion.

EGYPT

Starting from the 25th of January 2011, large scale demonstrations were organised in different cities in Egypt calling for an end to President Hosni Mubarak's three-decade rule.

Dissatisfactions over corruption, lack of freedom of speech, economic issues such as high unemployment, low wages, food price inflation and the enrichment of the ruling elite were the reasons for the protests which eventually led to Mubarak's exit in February 2011.



Although women participated alongside men in the revolution leading to Mubarak's resignation, they have been excluded from the political transition. In light of the risks of regression of their rights, women's organisations and activists have been urging the Egyptian government and parliament to include women and women's rights in bilateral and multilateral political dialogues, and recognise equal rights between men and women as the very foundation of a democratic society.

The Egyptian Women's Charter

In June 2011 the Egyptian Women's Charter was adopted by 500 non-governmental Egyptian organisations. It lists the social and political demands of Egyptian women towards building a democratic Egypt. Over half a million Egyptian signatures were reached within 2 months following a campaign by the Alliance of Arab Women and the Egyptian Women's Coalitions.

The Egyptian Women's Charter calls for women's political and social representation, for access to justice, for a strong national machinery, for a review and redress of discriminatory legislation, for the implementation of international human rights conventions as well as for the establishment of social and economic rights.

Unfortunately, the governing Supreme Council of Armed Forces mainly ignored these demands and women were excluded in the transition process. The number of women in parliament even decreased from 19 to 4 out of 180 seats. According to representatives of the Egyptian women's movement this exclusion is due to the existing patriarchal system and to the well organized Islamic organisations.

This led to their realization that women's power lies in their numbers and second, that women need to be better organized to use this power. This realization in its turn led women to set up new (umbrella) organisations, such as the Egyptian Feminist Union with over 100 women NGOs and to the revitalization of existing organisations, such as the Hoda Charawy Association, an Egyptian feminist organisation established in 1920.

In June 2012, a series of events threw the country's troubled transition to democracy deeper into confusion as Egypt's two most powerful forces, the military establishment and the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamist group, moved towards a showdown. With the election of President Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood, and after the parliamentary elections, Egypt moved to the next major step in its fitful political

transition: drafting a new constitution for the republic. As the fundamental document establishing a framework for governance, the new Egyptian constitution will have a lasting effect on Egyptian law, politics, and society.

In December 2012 the draft constitution and its referendum lead to renewed protests. Egyptian feminists movements said that the referendum on the draft constitution is void as it "crashes the aspirations of the people and the principles of the revolution".

A feminist group known as "Baheya Ya Masr" considered putting the draft constitution to a referendum without national consensus an attempt of one faction to dominate the country's fate. The group feared that the constitution would pave the way for "political Islam" which they argued disregards the most basic principles of democracy and transparency.

In a statement issued by "Baheya ya Masr" they said that the draft constitution includes some "ticking bombs" for women and children, slamming articles 2, 4, 219 which maintain that Sharia (Islamic law) is the main source of legislation and grants Al-Azhar the power of jurisdiction. Baheya's statement considered that this puts the state under the authority of clergymen - which contradicts the principles of democracy and threatens legal and social stability.

The statement pointed out that the constitution marginalized economic and social rights and mentioned it in loose terms that do not oblige the state to any health care or provide adequate housing or adequate remuneration.

According to a statement by "Nazra", another rights group the draft constitution did not stipulate women's right to equality, non-discrimination, political participation, employment, and healthcare or provide for the rights of children.

"The draft constitution ignores political participation of women, it did not adopt an electoral system to ensure their effective participation or that women are represented democratically within different elected assemblies", the statement said, adding that the draft constitution obliged political parties not to discriminate on the basis of sex but it did not oblige institutions of the state to do so.

The statement rejected restricting the right of organization only to unions and labor organizations, referring to the article's impact on women's ability to organize themselves in trade or professional unions.

Meanwhile, in a press conference last week, the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights said, "The current draft constitution does not represent Egyptian women in any way, but progressively ignores their rights as citizens."

Head of the Center Nehad Abu el-Komosan said that the draft constitution uses the same philosophy of the 1971 Constitution, where the rights are stated, but the application is referred either to the text of the law or in loose terms.

Abu el-Komosan interpreted the provisions of Article 10, which reads, "The state and society is keen to preserve the genuine nature of the Egyptian family and its moral values" as a call for women to return to their homes and opens the door for fundamentalists who wish to stick to background values.

Abu el-Komosan considered Article 8 which calls for equality insufficient, saying it is fake equality without guarantees.

Egyptian Feminist Union or the Hoda Shaarawi Association¹⁶

The Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU) started in 1920 as an umbrella organisation and has been a member of the International Alliance of Women since 1923.

The EFU joined the Egyptian Women Union EWU at its formation in October 2011.

Wishes, demands and priorities of EFU

EFU expects that the International Community provides

- a) solidarity and support by getting women's issues on the agenda; raising the subject of women's rights in their contacts with the authorities of the countries concerned.
- b) technical support and expertise.
- c) financial support.

New Woman Foundation (NWF)¹⁷

The New Woman Foundation (2011) is an Egyptian feminist non- governmental organization. NWF believes in women's unconditional right to freedom, equality and social justice, and considers women's social, political, economic, citizenship, sexual and reproductive rights as an integral part of human rights. In this context, NWF believes that the struggle by women cannot be separated from the struggle by nations and people for freedom and liberation from oppression.

NWF believes that the struggle for women's liberation is part of a wider struggle for democracy and social justice. It is also a struggle against all forms of discrimination based on gender, class, race, ethnicity or religion and against all forms of oppressive power relationships at the national, regional or global levels.

NWF Overall objective

The elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, whether cultural, social, economic, political or legal.

NWF Methods

NWF works through advocacy, action-oriented research and mobilization of women around gender specific issues. This includes the following:

- Mainstreaming women's rights issues within the political and social agendas.
- Promoting women's empowerment and self determination.
- Raising social awareness on gender issues.
- Dissemination of information on gender issues.
- Challenging taboos regarding women's issues.

NWF Activities

- Monitoring violations of women's rights and launching campaigns.
- Conducting research and studies.

¹⁶ <http://www.facebook.com/EgyptianFeministUnion>

¹⁷ www.nwrcegypt.org

- Organizing seminars and workshops as an independent organization, as well as in cooperation with other rights- based and community based organizations.
- Developing a specialized library unit.
- Providing training to community based organizations.
- Promoting the participation.
- Participating in national, regional and international campaigns on human rights issues in general and on women's rights in particular.
- Coordination and cooperation with organizations defending women rights on the national, regional and international level.
- Issuing publications and reports, such as: Feminist Theoretical Review "Tiba", Reproductive Health Matters "Arabic Edition", NWF Newsletter, a yearly Feminist Calendar, as well as the publication of other studies and research projects.

Wishes, Demands and Priorities of NWF

- To change policies and legislation which have a negative effect on women.
- To establish a National Women Machinery to secure women's social, economic, political and cultural rights.
- To changing the predominant patriarchal culture which prevails in Egyptian society.
- To promote democratic practices in society and the enhancement of a civil society, based on the full participation of marginalized and deprived sectors.
- Empower and support marginalized women - who suffer most from the impact of the present policies and the prevalent conservative discourse - to develop their full potential, enabling them to fully participate in society and to become positive contributors to society.
- To contribute to the feminist discourse nationally, regionally and globally, reflecting on the impact of the present situation on women's lives.
- Activate mechanisms of solidarity among global efforts aiming to empower women in practicing their rights, as means for achieving social justice in oppressed and dominant societies.

Center for Egyptian Women Legal Assistance (CEWLA)¹⁸

The Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance is a leading Egyptian women's lawyers group, founded in 1995 to advance women's rights through the law. It provides legal aid, mainly to impoverished women and it seeks to change discriminatory laws.

CEWLA supports and assists women in claiming their legal, social, economic and cultural rights. It also addresses violations of women's rights through the promotion of legal awareness.

CEWLA further provides women with the skills and abilities that enable them to take control over their own lives, to exercise their rights, and to overcome problems. To achieve this they are working directly within local communities.

CEWLA seeks cooperation with the international community to change discriminatory laws, particularly against women,

¹⁸ See: <http://www.cewla.org/index.php?lang=en> and <http://www.sigrid-rausing-trust.org/Grantees/Center-for-Egyptian-Womens-Legal-Assistance>.

Wishes, Demands and Priorities of CEWLA

1. Change discriminatory laws, such as the discriminatory divorce law.
2. Mainstream women's rights as an essential part of human rights.
3. Change the cultural heritage of the anti-Egyptian women's rights.
4. Promote the empowerment of women
5. Abolish all forms of violence against women, including Female Genital Mutilation and so called "honour crimes" .

CEWLA Practical goals

- Promote legal awareness of women's rights among the general public, judiciary, etc..
- Provide legal support to women in personal status cases, with civil and other problems, and facilitate the procurement of women's necessary papers such as personal identity papers.
- Organise literacy classes and additional courses on legal awareness and courses on social, health and other subjects.
- Change legislation that is derogatory to women, by drawing the attention of the concerned authorities, and through the formation of legal pressure groups.
- Arrange contacts between women's rights organizations, and the concerned executive and legislative institutions, and strengthen the foundations of their cooperation.
- Networking with other NGOs to spread awareness of the legal rights of women and children in the light of international conventions and the Constitution.

Alliance for Arab Women (AAW)¹⁹

The Alliance for Arab Women is a non-governmental organization, established in 1987 by the Ministry of Social Affairs, mainly dealing with cultural and social issues.

The Alliance consists of a network of 350 NGO's, spread throughout Egypt. It works as an umbrella organisation and cooperates with other Egyptian and Arab organizations, such as workers' unions, universities and the media. Its members participate in the projects that are developed by the Alliance.

The Alliance also collaborates with a number of international organizations, such as Swiss fund, USAID, UNDP, WITO, UN Women and UNICEF.

Main objectives AAW

The Alliance strives

1. to provide women with basic human rights protection by influencing policies and legislation, and by providing services and programs within the human rights framework.
2. to increase the capacity of women to be active and equal participants in their local communities, as well as to promote and strengthen the role of women in society.
3. Raising awareness under the general public.

AAW Mission

The Alliance cooperates with other stakeholders, such as workers' unions, universities and the media, in order to raise for women's rights.

Wishes, demands and priorities of AAW

¹⁹ <http://www.theallianceforarabwomen.org/>

For a better future and in order to improve the present situation of the Egyptian woman, the Alliance aims to achieve the following objectives:

- Seeks support from the international community in achieving its objectives.
- Advocating models of programs and services relevant to the real needs of Arab Women, particularly those of disadvantaged groups.
- Organize training programs to improve the socio-economic status of women and enable them to deal effectively with various institutions.
- Convene different kinds of meetings for open dialogue among those concerned and involved in Arab women's issues and for raising awareness within the Arab region.
- Disseminate the knowledge, the skills and the attitudes, which will improve the various patterns of behaviour within the Arab family structure.
- Establish relationships with various organizations concerned with problems facing women.

Egyptian Women's Coalitions²⁰

The Coalition of Women's NGOs in Egypt endorses and supports all the demands of the 25th of January revolution and strives to ensure the full participation of women in all efforts related to getting rid of the previous regime, including all its institutions and symbols. Therefore, the Coalition of Women's NGOs declares the following:

Firstly: They refuse the illegitimate National Council of Women or its representation of Egyptian women and the feminist efforts in Egypt and confirm the illegitimacy of its representation in international events.

Secondly: They call for the rapid dissolution of the National Council of Women and the prevention of its leaders of benefitting from any authorities in representing Egyptian women internally or internationally.

Thirdly: They reconfirm the demand included in the first statement about the urgent need to establish through consensus among the national forces a temporary civil presidential council that will be responsible for establishing a temporary committee composed of women's figures well known for their independence, integrity and efficiency, formed by consensus among women organizations and the Civil Society in order to represent Egyptian women at the local, Arab and international levels and ensure women's participation in shaping the political life during the current period.

Signatories:

- New Woman Foundation
- Women and Memory Forum
- Center of Egyptian Women Legal Aid
- El Nadeem Center for the Rehabilitation of the Victims of Violence
- Appropriate Communication Techniques for Development (ACT)
- Women's Forum for Development
- Alliance of Arab Women
- Egyptian Association for Family Development
- "Nazra" Association for Feminist Studies

²⁰ <http://nwrcegypt.org/en/?p=5614>

- “Omni” Association for Rights and Development
- “Heya” Foundation

Egyptian Association for Community Participation Enhancement (EACPE)²¹

The Egyptian Association for Community Participation Enhancement is a non-governmental, non-profit organization, founded in May 2001. Working actively in building capacities of a number of organizations, networks and coalitions which are the most active in implementing CRC, CEDAW, Beijing Platform of Action, and also in different activities of the civil society on the national, regional and international levels.

EACPE Programs

- *Democracy Development Program:*

Aiming to activate the role of Egyptian citizens in democratization and political reform. EACPE has monitored various elections through its “Democracy Status Watch”, such as the presidential, parliamentary, syndicate of engineers, and Trade Chambers elections. This program has a very strong connection with the media, which covers all monitoring reports. A yearly report is issued through this program on “Democracy Development in Egypt”. The program also works on empowering social actors to establish their free unions or groupings to present and advocate their socio-economic rights.

- *Human Rights education program (to school children):*

Aiming to promote Human Rights culture in schools and transforming this culture into a way of living. EACPE works in coordination with the Ministry of Education. This program has been implemented in 185 schools in 5 governorates. The program has succeeded in improving not only the schools’ environment but also relations in the family context. Human Rights Clubs in the target schools are organized and managed by students, who actively participate in the process of decision making in their schools. This program has fostered the culture of human rights in the target school with special emphasis on citizenship, democracy and gender equality.

- *Gender Equality Program:*

The program aims at influencing policies and legislations to promote gender equality in the Egyptian society, and to raising awareness and changing attitudes of social actors towards women's rights and mobilize the whole society towards combating violence against women. It works to empower women, in terms of their acquiring the skills, knowledge and experience to take greater responsibility for their lives, and also by influencing other factors which affect their lives. It works on enforcing the implementation of CEDAW at local, national and international levels. Also it works closely with women organizations as the coordinator of CEDAW Coalition, a member of the Coalition on combating violence against women, and a member of the Network on Women's Rights which is leading a campaign on changing the family laws towards a more just law.

Demands by the Egyptian Women’s Charter

As adopted in June 2011 by 500 non-governmental Egyptian organizations, obtaining over half a million Egyptian signatures within 2 months:

²¹ <http://www.en.mosharka.org/>

First: Representation of women

“There should be no exclusion of women or discrimination against them; women’s representation in the various fields is a right.

Second: International Conventions

“Government should hold its commitment to all international human rights conventions including the convention on the Elimination of all forms of discriminations against women

Third: Social and Economic Rights

“Women have the right to equal opportunities, fair and just laws, human security, education and healthcare.

Fourth: Legislations

All discriminatory legislation against women should be reviewed and redressed on basis of equality and justice.

Fifth: National Women Machinery

The establishment of a national women’s machinery linked to all ministries and governorates to support and activate the role of women

Sixth: Media and Women

Media should support women’s role by representing a true and positive image through raising awareness, changing stereotypes and opening opportunities for discussion.

Immediate proposed interventions:

1. Develop an election law that insure the representation of women in the parliament by not less than 30%
2. Adopt the proposed laws submitted by civil society to protect women from sexual harassment and domestic violence.
3. Enforce the implementation of CEDAW and eliminate reservations on articles 2 & 16.
4. Insure independent and empowered national machinery.

SYRIA

Women in Syria have a relatively long history of emancipation, and the country has been one of the more advanced in the Arab world when it comes to women's rights. Women obtained the right to vote in 1949, and their involvement in politics dates to the struggle for independence from the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the last century. However, the effects of their participation have been stifled by the realities of the repressive political climate. In the chaos and destruction created by the government's violent repression of the recent protests and demands for freedom and democratic reform, survival is the main concern of many citizens next to the resignation of President Assad with the end of the present regime and the end of violence and chaos.



The protests currently taking place in Syria are not being carried out exclusively by men. Women also play an important role. While the Syrian authorities have described from the beginning the anti-regime protests that have swept the country as being organized by Salafis or terrorist groups – which in itself is a self-fulfilling prophecy – these have not been exclusively carried out by men. Large women marchers were organized by urban and rural women to protest the detention of sons, husbands and male relatives and sometimes they were joined by other male relatives. These women carried placards demanding the release of all political prisoners, the lifting of the emergency laws and the introduction of greater freedoms. Syrian activists have also created Facebook pages that have attracted thousands of visitors calling for protests in solidarity with female detainees whose relatives are political prisoners. Covering the head is a traditional rather than a religious statement in southern Syria, but many women did not wear a headscarf during the demonstrations and appeared unveiled on the streets.

Women in Syria have not only been active in the demonstrations. They have also played an important role in promoting political and human rights. Female political activists did this by promoting the demands of the Syrian people by appearing on Arab and non-Arab news channels and explaining the goals of Syrian protesters. Meanwhile, female human rights activists document violations carried out by the security forces and female lawyers worked on behalf of the protesters and document human rights abuses.

The Syrian authorities maintain that the protests currently sweeping the country are part of a foreign plot to foster sectarian strife in the country, and they insist that Salafist elements are responsible for carrying out violent acts and instigating the protest, a self-fulfilling prophecy.

As we all know there is not much reliable detailed news from Syria, and certainly not good news. It is clear that fundamentalists groups take advantage of the situation and increased their influence, which is not good news for anybody, let alone for women.

Before the present protests began, women in Syria had not participated in political demonstrations for a long time. Any protest taking place was within the framework of

the Syrian General Women's Union (GWU), an affiliate of the Ba'ath Party and overseen by the authorities. The GWU is the only existing organisation of its kind, the government having disbanded women's organisations affiliated to other political parties. Most rallies sponsored by the GWU are in support of the regime, and the organisation rarely makes social demands.

The Syrian women taking part in the protests against the regime have emphasized that they do not belong to any political group. Rather, they seek the freedom that has long been denied to all, men and women alike.²²

Despite their illegal status, independent groups do operate in varying degrees of secrecy. The Syrian Women's League (SWL), for instance, has carried on its work continuously since 1948. However, this precarious existence has made it difficult for such groups to function. Unregistered groups have problems raising funds, particularly in light of a ban on accepting grants from abroad. They also face significant obstacles in attracting members and mobilizing women to claim their rights.

General Union of Syrian Women (GWU)

The only legal women's organization is the General Union of Syrian Women (GWU), an affiliate of the Ba'ath Party that receives state funding. According to party philosophy, the GWU represents all Syrian women, obviating the need for independent women's groups. In practice, this monopoly excludes dissenting views on government policies and delays action on specific problems, since initiatives and complaints have to filter up through the unwieldy, multilayered administrative structure of the Ba'ath Party.

The GWU was founded in 1967 by a consortium of women's groups. The union is divided into fourteen branches throughout Syria, which assist associations and centers that deal with women's and children's issues and promote the active participation of women working in and outside the home. Internationally, the union has forged close ties with women's organizations throughout the Arab world. These groups meet, exchange ideas, share experiences, and prepare new strategies to improve women's lives in the region and allow them fuller participation. The union also works closely with the United Nations and international nongovernmental organizations.

Some of the GWU's expressed strategies include: researching laws and legislation that deal with women, their citizenship rights and responsibilities, and any discrepancies between the ideals of equality and the current realities; working to ensure that laws are in place to protect and promote women and their human rights, and that they are enforced at all levels of government; helping women understand their rights and responsibilities and providing them with the knowledge and support they need to make the most of their opportunities; addressing social issues such as poverty, health care, education, and family planning and their effect on women; enhancing women's ability to participate in decision-making at the national level and at home; and eradicating gender-related stereotypes that place women at a disadvantage.

²² <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2011/1047/re2.htm>

Syrian Women League (SWL)

The SWL is a women's democratic organization established in 1948 and has continued its activities despite its illegal status.

MAIN OBJECTIVES SWL:

- To raise awareness and enhance knowledge on women issues and equality, among women and within society at large.
- To change women-issues from being a feminine issue for women only into a matter of considerable public concern.
- To promote changing National legislation, that does not yet conform to the principle of equality, so that it will be consistent with the Constitution, which ensures complete equality in rights between men and women.

ACTIVITIES OF SWL

- To participate in all relevant international conferences on women.
- To participate in several Arab political (regional and international) activities.
- To hold seminars and workshops.
- To organize groups to carry out their objectives and organize activities against the current regime.
- To participate in gender training courses organized by the Arab Project for Information & Communication Mashrek Maghreb in cooperation with different Syrian women organizations.
- To promote the following wishes, demands and priorities.

WISHES, DEMANDS, PRIORITIES OF SWL

- To withdraw all reservations to CEDAW.
- To modify the Personal Status Act (PSA) so that it conforms with the principle of equality in rights between men and women, and thus does not discriminate between men and women.
- To contribute to Arab campaigns to counter violence against women.
- To integrate gender in public government policies.
- To promote and strengthen awareness of the gender concept within Syrian society.
- To denounce prevailing social values within society based on discrimination between men and women.
- To improve women's image in mass media, including audio visual media.
- To promote awareness of the occurrence of all forms of violence: domestic, social, legal, physical, and psychological.

The National Association for Woman Role Development (AWRD)

The ARWD is a non-governmental organization that strives to empower the Syrian woman and to become an equal partner to the Syrian man in society. The ARWD aims at enabling women to enhance their contribution to the development and progress of their society.

ACTIVITIES OF AWRD

- *Advocacy and media activities*
 1. AWRD conducted two campaigns to abolish article 548 of the Syrian penal code which contains a lenient penalty for 'honour crimes'.

2. AWRD organizes lectures and symposia on women's rights, violence against women, women in decision-making and the role of women in sustainable development.
- *Community based services*
 1. AWRD made a contract with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs which enabled it to provide the appropriate services for girls in the Institute of Social Education For Girls in Damascus. This Institute is a center for Juvenile Girls and in the same time functions as a shelter for underage victims of violence, and homeless girls under the age 18.
 2. AWRD has been working on establishing the first official shelter for female victims of violence.
 - *Research and studies*

AWRD has conducted three studies on:

 1. Social attitude towards women's organizations in Syria.
 2. Analytical study on violence against women in Syria.
 3. Descriptive study on the existent women's shelters in Damascus.

WISHES, DEMANDS, PRIORITIES AND OBJECTIVES OF AWRD

- Goal I: Raising public awareness, especially amongst women, in the area of women's rights, her social role and developing her participation in the progress and development of the Syrian society.
 - Objective One: Raising awareness among women on their legislative, social and health rights.
 - Objective Two: Promote women's legislative rights as a fundamental component of the equality and human rights concepts.
 - Objective Three: Promote the fundamental role of women in society, her contribution in the decision-making process and in social development.
- Goal II: Meet women's unmet needs, like legal consultancy and rehabilitating of victims of violence.
 - Objective One: Provide legal consultancy for women.
 - Objective Two: Provide medical and psychological services to rehabilitate victims of violence.
- Goal III: Advocate the modification or abolishment of the existing laws which constitute discrimination against women
 - Objective One: Advocate the amendment of legislation which constitutes discrimination against women and doesn't consider women's full citizenship according to the institution of the Syrian Arab Republic, and the conventions related to human and women's rights which have been ratified by the Syrian government.
 - Objective Two: Disseminate and explain the texts of the conventions and agreements related to human and women's rights which have been ratified by the Syrian government, in particular CEDAW.
 - Objective Three: Advocate the implementation of all legislation which sustains women's rights and gender equality, in particular the texts which penalize violence against women in the penal code.

YEMEN

The Nobel Peace Prize finally has an Arab female winner. In a year of protest and change across the Arab world, it was only right that the efforts, and sacrifices, of the millions of Arabs who have come out onto their streets and faced their government's bullets were recognized. Frankly, it is also right that the Yemeni Yasmine revolution, often ignored, has been recognized.



Yemen has had female rulers in its long history, in pre-Islamic time Bilquis, the famous Queen of Sheba. Less well known and noteworthy are two women who ruled from 1066 to 1138 with the blessing of the Caliph as Heads of an Islamic Yemeni State whereas the Khutba (Friday prayer) was recited in their name. While Yemeni women haven't quite reached that level in the modern era, they have certainly made giant strides in 2011. Women are a sizeable part of the protest movement, and are visible – up to 30% - throughout the various protest squares around the country, and on marches. Female protesters have stood atop government vehicles during protests, and faced water cannon and bullets. They have kept the field hospital running around the clock. There was a recent show on Arab satellite television debating the various issues concerning women in the Arab world. A Saudi woman spoke of wanting to drive, a Yemeni woman of overthrowing a dictator.

(Yemen) Women Journalists without chains (WJWC)²³

The human rights group Women Journalists Without Chains (WJWC) was co-founded in 2005 by Nobel Prize laureate Tawakkol Karman, together with seven other female journalists in order to promote human rights, particularly freedom of opinion and expression, and democratic rights. Long before any journalist had even invented the term "Arab Spring", Tawakkol Karman set up an organisation, Women Journalists Without Chains, and, with her group, went about protesting various issues. From 2008 she held weekly protests outside the cabinet building in Sanaa, publicizing matters such as political prisoners, human rights abuses and drone attacks, among others. For three years this continued; sometimes the protests were large, sometimes small, but they continued. When the Arab call for freedom and dignity reached Yemen, Tawakkol Karman was there to take the lead. WJWC calls upon the international community to offer support in their struggle for freedom of expression and gender equality.

Wishes, Demands and Priorities of WJWC:

- Freedom of opinion and freedom of speech
- Freedom of movement
- Implementation by the Yemeni Government of democratic rights
- Equal rights for women and men

²³ www.womenpress.org

- Adoption of laws by the Yemeni Government preventing females younger than 17 years from getting married
- Women should stop being or feeling that they are part of the problem and instead become part of the solution
- Implementation by the Yemeni Government and by the International Community of their human rights commitments.
- Support by the International Community in Yemenis struggle for freedom of expression and gender equality.

Yemeni Women's National Committee²⁴

The Women's National Committee of Yemen is a government affiliated body promoting the empowerment of women. Local Yemenis work on the committee in cooperation with national and international partners to safeguard women's fundamental human rights. The Millennium Development Goals provide the framework for the committee's main priority policies.

Mandate / Main Objectives

The main objectives and responsibilities of the Yemeni Women's National Committee are to

empower Yemeni women in economic, social, educational, cultural and political fields by

- Proposing government policies, strategies, plans, and programs related to women issues.
- Monitoring the government's implementation of legislation relating to women issues.
- Preparing proposals to modify legislation and policies in accordance with women's rights.
- Reviewing with the use of gender budgeting criteria the government's annual budget proposals and its final accounts.
- Raising awareness amongst women of their rights by disseminating information on relevant legislation.
- Gathering sex segregated data through nationwide surveys.
- Producing reports related to women issues.
- Conducting conferences, seminars, and workshops related to women issues.
- Carrying out any other tasks assigned by the Supreme Council.

WISHES, DEMANDS AND PRIORITIES OF YEMENI WOMEN'S NATIONAL COMMITTEE

The committee issued its fourth Five-Year Action Plan on February 22, 2011, which aims to empower Yemeni women in economic, social, educational, cultural and political fields. The plan identifies several concrete priorities:

- To increase the rate of female employment to 30 percent over the next five years. The rate of female employment was 20 percent as of 2008. In particular, the committee seeks to integrate women into four of the most promising economic fields in Yemen, namely fisheries, agriculture, tourism and start-up industrial projects.
- To increase girls' enrolment in schools from 76 percent in 2008 to 95 percent by 2015.
- To remove from 32 Yemeni laws discriminatory language against women by proposing amendments.
- to continue its efforts to curtail violence against women by

²⁴ <http://www.yemen-women.org/en/about-wnc.php>

- building ten special houses for battered women and
- Establishing new departments in police stations to receive complaints on domestic violence.
- Support of the International Community of the above priorities.

Obstacles of implementation

The committee has identified three main obstacles to fulfil its mandate and objectives:

- *Local Capacity for Implementation:*
Senior committee officials constantly complain that Yemeni government authorities lack the required ability to implement plans designed for the empowerment of women. Committee members suggest that they know what Yemeni women need, the problem is the flawed implementation of government's policies.
- *Extent of the Problem:*
Yemen consistently ranks as the worst country on the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap reports. This includes the latest 2010 report. For example, according to a 2007 report by the International Centre for Research on Women, 48 percent of women under 18 in Yemen are married. If almost half of Yemeni girls get married before they turn 18 it complicates committee efforts to convince them to pursue higher education. This leaves the committee with little to build on in its attempt to achieve their fairly ambitious goals for the improvement of Women's situation.
- *Political Stability:*
Yemen has not been immune to the current upheavals across the Arab Middle East. In fact, the situation in Yemen is particularly unstable and has cast a shadow over all Yemeni government initiatives including their work on women's empowerment. Nevertheless, present tensions may offer more opportunities for women if civil war is averted and the warring parties reach a compromise to establish a reformed government that is more responsive to the needs of its people.

Yemeni Women's Union (YWU)²⁵

Yemeni Women's Union has 21 branches. On International Women's day 2012 it handed to the Prime Minister a document with women's demands, resulting from a nationwide survey on the challenges and problems facing Yemeni women. As follows:

Main challenges

- Discrimination
- Negative attitudes towards women
- Violence
- Hindering traditions

Main problems

- Traditional attitudes of the male dominated society and
- Stereotypes resulting in
- Systematic undermining of women's role
- Shortage of income generation opportunities for women and
- High food prices resulting in
- Inability to meet their basic needs

²⁵ <http://yemeniwomen.org/>

- Cultural problems resulting in
- Inability to explore their potential and improve their personal and professional capacities

WISHES, DEMANDS AND PRIORITIES OF YWU

- In the political sector:
 - Better democracy
 - Freedom to participate
 - Protection of human rights
- In the health sector:
 - Free birth delivery services,
 - Availability of adequate health centres
 - Reproductive health services
- In the educational sector:
 - Provision of educational material, books and teaching tools
 - Improvement of the educational environment

BAHRAIN

Bahrain's stillborn revolution received less international attention.

Demonstrations which started in February 2011 following the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt. Women participated alongside men in these demonstrations and subsequently organised as leaders, protesting against unlawful arrest and detention and demanding release of political prisoners.



The Syrian people demanded freedom and long-promised political and social reforms with a directly elected parliament and the replacement of the Sunni elite dominated government; whereas equal rights and ending discrimination against women were not among the demands, neither was the end of the Sunni Monarchy.

This solidarity movement, in which both Sunni and Shiite citizens participated at the start, quickly devolved in a sectarian rift by the exploitation of Sunni fears of being overwhelmed by the Shiite majority should representative democracy be implemented. Some (Sunni) say the sectarian problem should be solved first, others (Shiite) that the sectarian problem will be eliminated if there is more democracy. Stymied by an unyielding regime and the sectarian divide Bahraini got repression instead.

Bahrain has a Sunni monarchy with a Shiite majority (60-70%). Shiites have been protesting for years against long-standing perception of discrimination in many areas of life, amongst other in employment opportunities. Of the unemployed 95% are Shiites. One of the burning issues between Sunni and Shiite is the Family - Personal Status Law, which defines - limits - women's rights.

Bahrain endorsed CEDAW. However, there is still a huge gap between de jure and de facto equality. The Global Gender Gap Index 2012 of the World Economic Forum puts Bahrain on place 111 out of 135 countries where discrimination against women is highest.

The government's commitments to CEDAW are not yet translated into national secular law.

Although the Constitution states that there should be no discrimination on basis of sex, it adds that Sharia is the principal source for legislation, referring specifically to the duties and role of women. The different interpretation of religious laws between the ruling minority Sunni and the majority Shiite population adds to the sectarian divide and mistrust between population groups, including between NGO's.

In the employment sector one finds the same contradictions: women's employment is relatively high, whereas there are no (secular) laws against the widespread discrimination in the sector. The religious rules, again different for Sunni and Shiite, are also discriminatory and limit women's opportunities in this sector, such as those restricting property ownership and acquiring wealth by women. Notwithstanding those rules there is a successful Association of Businesswomen, whose members set up businesses of their own.

The most contentious law, as stated before, is the Family Law. Whereas the present Personal Status Law applies to the Sunni population only and is executed by National courts, the Shiite population is dependent on the Shiite Sharia courts dealing with family law. The latter being said to be corrupt and incompetent.

Women have demonstrated since 2005 for one unified Personal Status Law applicable to all its citizens and executed by national courts, not the religious courts. The draft 2009 Personal Status Law which should have met those demands was cancelled and not adopted.

There are no laws dealing with violence against women. So called honour crimes and other forms of Violence against women are often defended by a Bahraini law which states “nothing is considered a crime as long as it is the exercise of a right granted by law or custom.”

Restricting women’s organisations further is the 1989 Law of Associations which states that NGO’s must receive prior approval of the Social Affairs Ministry to deal with public affairs issues as well as to contact international organisations or accept foreign funding. Without such approval these organisations can be punished or even dissolved.

Supreme Women Council (SCW) of the Government

Established in 2001, it is chaired by the King’s wife and is reporting directly to the King. The council consists of 16 females appointed by royal decree.

The Supreme Women Council is a government advisory body, the main official organisation responsible for all activities related to women’s issues.

Main Objective SCW

- To advise the government on women’s issues
- To represent Bahraini women,
- To defend and develop women’s rights.

The Council did set up training programmes for women to participate in municipal and national elections, but it did little to represent *all* Bahraini women or to improve women’s social and economic rights, ignoring their real problems and needs.

The Council did not support wholeheartedly NGO’s who were working for women’s rights and sometimes hindered their registration and their work.

Although 20% of women of marriageable age are single – unmarried, divorced, widowed, abandoned - the Council did hardly anything to assist these women to survive by earning a decent salary for decent work, thereby increasing the risks for these women to become victims of human trafficking and prostitution and it did nothing to combat other forms of violence against women or the exploitation of children according to Bahrain Center for Human Rights. In the meantime human trafficking and prostitution increased openly with impunity.

The Bahrain Center for Human Rights concludes that the Supreme Women Council, which was established to represent all Bahraini women and develop and defend their rights, ended up to promote the interests of the regime at the expense of women’s rights. Quote “It is evident that the SCW is under the strict control of women from the ruling

family and those loyal to the regime in exchange for personal gains". Other organisations agree with this view.

The Women Petition Committee even called for the dissolution of the SCW.

NGO's working for women's rights

Fakir Al Gharaibeh names 7 Bahraini Women NGO's that are working for equal political and social rights.²⁶ He identifies the obstacles facing these NGO's to develop and implement strategies to obtain their objectives and he also formulates some solutions.

Obstacles facing NGO's work for women's rights

- Bahraini women are generally unaware of their political and social rights
- Bahraini women often lack information on these rights and therefore do not claim these
- Women have not moved into decision-making positions.
- NGO's are mainly active in urban areas and less in rural areas
- Lack of logistical and financial support, which hits local women organisations hardest.
- Violence against women is often condoned by religious motives.
- Bahraini law states that NGO's must have permission before organising meetings to discuss public issues or organise activities on sensitive women's issues
- Contacts with international organisations require the prior approval of the Social Affairs Ministry, as regulated by the 1989 Law of Associations
- The government does not allow international funding for NGO's
- Without such prior approvals these organisations can be punished and even dissolved.
- Some reluctance by women themselves to engage outside the home.

Solutions

- Improve women's and men's education about political processes
- Make information accessible
- Re-thinking particularly by religious leaders and men of the traditional roles of women
- Revising laws ensuring full equal social, economic and political rights for women.

The Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR)

Women as well as men are members of the Bahrain Center of Human Rights. It is itself a member of the Federation Internationale des ligues des Droits de l'Homme (FIDH)

WISHES, DEMANDS AND PRIORITIES OF BCHR (see below under WISHES, DEMANDS AND PRIORITIES OF the Women's Petition Committee)

Women Petition Committee (under the umbrella of the BCHR)

This Committee was founded in 2002 within the BCHR and is headed by Ghada Jamshir, a Bahraini women's rights activist and an ardent campaigner for the reform of Sharia courts in Bahrain and the Arab States of the Persian Gulf. The Women's Petition Committee lobbies for a law that would shift jurisdiction over family and women's affairs from Islamic Sharia court to civil courts.

²⁶Journal of International Women's Studies March vol.12, 2011

The Committee's first activities were:

- To call on the authorities to refrain from politicizing women's rights for the political agenda of the ruling class.
- To call for reforms by law that give women their rights and responsibilities as full citizens.

In 2007 the Women's Petition Committee called for the dissolution of the High Council of Women because of its failure in "building and supporting women" calling it "a political propaganda tool for the ruling party". The Women's Petition Committee published a book "The Executioner and the Victim in Sharia Courts" which documented cases of violations by the courts. Although some judges mentioned in this document were subsequently dismissed, violations and serious shortcomings still occur. The Women's Petition Committee also documented cases of violation of women's rights. and started a campaign to combat prostitution and human trafficking.

WISHES, DEMANDS AND PRIORITIES OF the Women's Petition Committee

- To acknowledge women's rights.
- To cease the use of feminist slogans as political propaganda.
- To abolish organisations working along these agendas, starting with the Supreme Council of Women.
- To introduce, revise or enact legislations that protects women's rights:
 - A family law suited for all religious sectors, applied to all women in Bahrain including members of the Royal family.
 - A nationality law to ensure that children of Bahraini women have the right to gain their mother's citizenship.
 - A law protecting against violence within the family.
 - A social security law for underprivileged women and those handicapped, disabled and of special needs.
 - A law that criminalises human trafficking, abuse of minors, and extortion of the underprivileged.
- To cease all forms of discrimination against women at work in all official, legislative and social organisations.
- To implement the principles of CEDAW.
- To provide real opportunities for independent women's (rights) organisations to exercise its activities.
- To provide independent women's (rights) organisations financial and logistical support.
- To eliminate all obstacles that impede the effectiveness and independence of women's (rights) organisation.

Bahrain Woman's Union (BWU)²⁷

The Bahrain Women's Union is an umbrella organisation of 12 non-governmental Bahraini women associations. The BWU was hindered by the Supreme Women Council and its registration was blocked for years. Even after its registration in 2006 it is restricted by the 1989 Law of Associations.

²⁷ <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/2999>

According to the Women's Union bylaw, no women, irrespective of her activities or capabilities, can join the Union unless she joins one of its constituents associations. According to Bahrain Center for Human Rights (FIDH member) "this elite Union is consequently deprived from representing large segments of Bahraini women or play a genuine and influential role in the maintenance of and defending women's rights. Furthermore, the Bahraini Authorities ensured that area of manoeuvrability of this Union is curtailed, regardless of the dedication of its members who represent specific and limited women societies in Bahrain. Unless the Union can open its door to all women, regardless of their ideological affiliation, and obtains proper funding to support its activities to play a more effective role in community support, cultural and social security reforms, the Union will continue to be ineffective and incapable of reforming the status quo, or in preventing the infliction of harm on women. Instead, the Union will add to the official establishment another "colour" to improve its image among the international community".²⁸

WISHES, DEMANDS AND PRIORITIES OF BWU

- To include the international standards and principles of CEDAW into national laws.
- To introduce a quota system in elections.
- To reform the Family and Personal Status Law into one unifying law applicable to all women.
- To prioritize a law on violence against women including penalties for perpetrators.
- To abolish all forms of discrimination against women.
- To promote awareness of the importance of women's active participation in civil society.
- To advance and empower Bahraini women and their rights.
- To enable women to participate in the development process.
- To provide computer training for women.

Bahraini Women Association for Human Development (BWA)

Bahrain Women Association - for Human Development (BWA) is a non-profit organization dedicated to empowering women to actively participate in public life, and to maximize their contribution to Bahrain's democratic transition. Through activities including training workshops and seminars, radio and television programs, advocacy campaigns and networking, BWA promotes active citizen participation among women. Officially established in 2001, the vision of BWA is "to empower leaders for the human development era."²⁹

BWA conducts leadership training at the local, national, and regional level. BWA has organized Leading to Choices training workshops for women's associations throughout Bahrain, as well as in other areas of the region, including Oman and Saudi Arabia. Workshops focus on highlighting the strengths of women, and on the importance of prioritizing goals in women's associations. BWA has also organized a series of workshops for grassroots women in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Development in Bahrain. The workshops focus on the concept of self assessment as a first step in developing organizational leadership.

²⁸ <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/2999>

²⁹ <http://www.learningpartnership.org/bwa>

BWA has been active in raising awareness on nationality issues and family law reform, conducting public events, media outreach and legislative advocacy. BWA engages in advocacy for the creation of a comprehensive Family Law implementing a Shi'a family code that will be consistent with the Sunni family law, passed in May 2010, which protects the rights of Sunni women in Sharia courts.

Main Objectives of BWA

- Empowering women to assume a leading role in human development.
- Promoting awareness of environmental issues, on harmful practices, abuse and neglect of the environment
- Providing counseling and support to citizens how to reach sustainable development.
- Enhancing cooperation on national and international level with other organizations which have similar objectives,

WISHES, DEMANDS AND PRIORITIES OF BWA

- To empower women to play a leading role in society according to social justice principles.
- To enhance awareness within society of child abuse and neglect.
- To promote environmental healthy practices on both individual and community level.
- To participate in the proposition and development of human development strategies/programs/activities
- To educate all citizens on their rights.
- To eliminate new forms of illiteracy (such as the new media?) with the objective to improve access to information :
- To enhance effective communication among society sectors and social institutions and organizations with common interests.

The "Respect" Movement (under the umbrella of the Bahrain Human Rights Watch Society)

Respect is a joint movement between the BHRWS and the National Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women. The Bahrain Human Rights Watch Society (BHRWS) is a Bahraini human rights organization established in November 2004. It consists of lawyers, women rights activists, victims of violence and concerned citizens.

BHRWS's president is Houda Ezra Nonoo, making the Society unique in the Arab world in being the only human rights group headed by a Jewish woman. Nonoo is a business woman. Another prominent member is trade unionist, Faisal Fulad.

In association with the National Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women, the BHRWS launched the Respect Movement, starting with a petition in support of one unified Personal Status Law to protect women in divorce and child custody. The second part of the Respect Movement's agenda is a petition for laws to protect housemaids, who are currently not protected by Bahrain's labour laws, and to fight for women's rights in general.

It promotes pen pal letter exchange between abused women and members of non-governmental organisations with the objective to raise awareness and understanding of the issue and raise funds for its campaigns.

WISHES, DEMANDS AND PRIORITIES OF the "Respect" Movement

- Immediate implementation of the 2009 Personal Status Law
- To include a chapter in the labour law for the protection of migrant workers.
- To protect domestic workers that suffer at the hands of their employers.
- To secure equal rights for women and men

III. Regional Organisations

Collectif 95 Maghreb Egalité³⁰

The Collectif 95 Maghreb Egalité is a network of organizations established in 1995, and originating from the women's movement of the three Maghreb countries: Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. It noticed that whereas the political status and social situation of women in the region have improved due to important legal changes. The social and political resistance remains very strong whereas new threats to the gains and rights secured by Maghreb women loom large on the horizon.

It believes that the struggle for women's true equality and full citizenship must be founded on respect for women's rights in both the public and private spheres. It also finds that women's present legal inferiority within the family is, in effect, at the root of discrimination against women in the public sphere. In turn, discrimination in the fields of social, economic, political and cultural activity slows down, and even impedes any significant progress in women's legal status as codified in personal status and family laws.

The Collectif 95 Maghreb Egalité has based its initiative upon the elaboration of one hundred measures and provisions for an egalitarian codification of Family and Personal Status Laws in the Maghreb.

Wishes, Demand and Priorities of 95 Maghreb Egalité

The current objective is to explicitly affirm the following elements in the texts of national laws, Constitutions and Codes:

- Equality of men and women before the law in rights, duties.
- Equality between spouses by abolishing the notion of the head of family (husband) and the duty of obedience (wife).
- Providing women with the opportunity to take responsibility for supporting the family in the same manner as men.
- The replacement of paternal authority with parental responsibility.
- Equality in the matter of inheritance.
- Equal rights for men and women to pass on nationality to their children.
- Rejection of all forms of racial discrimination or religious discrimination in the area of family relations.
- Legal protection of children before and after birth by the recognition of natural filiations.³¹

In fact, in the Maghreb today, the question of equality between women and men in all areas is linked to the fundamental issue of secularizing family law. Wishes, demands and priorities after the Arab revolution of the Collectif95...see Chapter on Tunisia.

³⁰ <http://www.euromedrights.org/eng/category/countries/regional-members/collectif-95-maghreb-egalite/>

³¹ A full list of the measures and provisions can be found at: <
www.wluml.org/sites/wluml.org/files/import/english/pubs/rtf/misc/100-steps.rtf>

KARAMA³²

'Karama' is the Arabic word for dignity.

KARAMA as an organization was launched in 2005 to provide a framework for coordination, cooperation and linkage among people in the Middle East and North Africa working to stop violence against women, and to promote full equal participation. Karama redefined violence, found new solutions and emphasizes the importance to work with grassroots women.

With headquarters in Cairo, Egypt, and an office in Amman, Jordan, Karama began from 2005 to build a cascading national and regional movement to end violence against women. Karama's partners include organizations in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Algeria, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia, and Palestine with experience in, research, service provision, community outreach, and working directly at grassroots level with targeted groups and victims.

Karama convenes activists and experts across seven sectors or fields of interest to form national networks which address violence as both a cause and a consequence of the challenges facing each country's situation in economics, health, art/culture, education, media and laws. The solutions to end violence come from each of these seven sectors- and each fortifies the other.

Karama has succeeded in initiating an unprecedented range of multi-sectoral collaboration and advocacy by women across the region at the national, regional and international level.

Utilizing available information on the causes and consequences of violence, Karama's individual participants and organizational partners have worked to expand the concept of violence against women and push aside old boundaries separating one form of violence from another form of violence. They use their own analysis to propose their own strategies and new solutions, and together the different organizations build national action plans. Their aim is to build a regional movement to end violence against women.

What makes Karama different?

Karama's approach to ending violence against women is one of the things that distinguishes it from other initiatives. Rather than looking at violence and its victims in isolation, Karama takes a broader view in the belief that violence affects women and men, girls and boys, at all levels of society and in all areas of their lives. Therefore to bring an end to violence against women, it is necessary to identify the ways it affects and is affected by economics, law, health, media, education, and art/culture—the things that matter most in people's daily lives—and to design strategies to combat it through each of these areas.

³² <http://www.el-karama.org/content/about-karama>

Wishes, Demands and Priorities of Karama

- To build upon and strengthen efforts to end violence against women by bringing together local women's organizations and other civil society groups in collaboration, analysis, and advocacy at national, regional, and international levels.
- to widen the national constituencies working to end violence against women in the Middle East and North Africa.
- to widen the roles and contributions of Arab women in key civil society sectors.
- to raise the profile and expand the influence of Arab women as leaders in regional and international contexts.

Since 2011 Karama has organized conferences with participants from 18 Arab countries following the Arab uprisings, resulting in the following Wishes, Demands and Priorities:

- Equal representation and participation in all democratic processes.
- Equal participation in all decision making bodies.
- Lifting reservations and implementing CEDAW.
- Training women leaders, including grassroots women politicians and candidates.
- Urging the International community to pledge resources and technical support.
- Urging the International community to make their aid-gender sensitive support women's needs.
- Implementation of UN Security Council's mandatory Resolution 1325 and subsequent Resolutions 1820, 1888, 1889, and 1960 are an invaluable piece of international law calling for increased roles and representation of women in formal peace processes, conflict resolution, and transitional governments, and prosecution of sexual violence as a weapon in wartime.

In Karama's recent plan called 'Advancing Women's Participation, Security, and Rights in the Arab World' they formulated their priorities for 2012-2015 as follows:

- Integrating women's rights into new constitutions and existing legal frameworks to promote women's participation, security and protection.
- Expanding, deepening, and building the institutional capacity and actions of partners and their constituencies to systematically combat factors perpetuating violence against women.
- To eliminate discriminatory laws.
- Raising the profile of Arab women as leaders and exerts at the national, regional and international levels.
- Advancing women's political participation.

Women, peace and security: demanding accountability for implementing resolutions 1325 and 1820 in the Arab region

In the struggle to reverse women's lack of representation, the The group of women used the CSW event to invoke Resolution 1325 and call for increased roles and representation of women in the Arab region's politics and transition processes.

Besides the event the group of female activists from the MENA region had lobby and advocacy meetings with UN agency leaders, official delegations of Member States and representatives of the - international - women's movement, trade unions etc.

IV. Final Remarks

In the transition period after the Arab revolution it is important that women's wishes, demands and priorities are recognised and included into the democratic reforms.

This report describes the formulated wishes, demands and priorities of women's organisations in 8 Arab countries. The selection of women's organisations was more or less arbitrary: those we could receive or find information on, and which worked nationally or regionally and had formulated their wishes, demands and priorities officially and made those known.

Although the political and socio-economic situation varies significantly across the region, and each country has its own history and identity, it is remarkable how similar the wishes, demands and priorities of women are across the region. And in each country citizens - men and women - demonstrated for the same: dignity, freedom and democratic reform and women were welcomed to participate alongside men.

Although women through women's organisations have formulated their wishes, demands and priorities, they are seldom listened to and women are often ignored by politicians and decision makers. There are several reasons for this, which are mentioned in the report.

Traditional attitudes of both men and women towards the role expected from women, defined and delimited by household duties, raising children and responding to husband's wishes are difficult to change. Moreover, in countries with a Muslim majority there is a real conflict between citizens who want a political system based on Islamic principles and Koranic law and citizens who want a secular state with separation of State and Religion. Worse, some politicians misuse their so called religious principles for political and personal gain.

Further, male politicians are often simply not aware of the situation of women and the different needs of women and men and are often not aware of the negative outcome of their policies for women. This is true for European politicians as well as for Arab politicians. The recent World Forum for Democracy of the Council of Europe had 15 male and one female speaker in its openings session, at the same time the Secretary General of the Council stresses that equal rights for women is a condition for real democracy. Nobody noticed.

On the socio-economic situation of women in the 8 Arab countries we draw attention to two facts.

First, the educational level. It is well known that the literacy level varies enormously between the countries, from nearly 100% in Tunisia to as low as ±30% in Yemen and Egypt.

Less well known is the fact that in several countries – Libya, Bahrain among these – the majority of higher educated are women ±60%, although this is not reflected in their participation in political and public life.

Second, the high numbers of single women of marriageable age - 20% in Bahrain, 30% in Yemen up to 35% in Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE. These numbers comprise unmarried,

divorced, abandoned and widowed women. The consequences of these high numbers are underestimated and subsequently their socio-economic problems are not dealt with. Many of these women become victims of human trafficking and prostitution and violence.

Violence against women is mentioned by nearly all women organisations as a major problem, often condoned by religious law or custom. Bahraini law states “nothing is considered a crime as long as it is the exercise of a right granted by law or custom”. It is named as a priority issue to be dealt with by law, by raising awareness of the problem and by practical assistance to victims.

Nearly all women organisations include the demand for equal rights in all areas of life, to include International Human Rights principles into National Law and implement these laws. CEDAW is named specifically and particularly the lifting of reservations to CEDAW. These reservations often pertain to Family law. The demand to change Family law is also a recurring priority in order to secure equality between women and men in family affairs.

Non-discrimination, equal participation, equal access to education, health and economic opportunities are all recurring wishes and demands. The Egyptian Charter summarises these wishes, demands and priorities as does the 20 measures for equality of the FIDH Report.