

WIDE Annual Conference 2011

Women's Rights and Gender Equality amidst the 'Arab Springs'

Challenges and Lessons Learnt across Regions

27-28 October 2011, Brussels, Belgium

What is now known as the 'Arab springs' has started in December 2010 in Tunisia. This has had a dramatic ripple effect all over the region. To date, the whole region is in upheaval though to different degrees. Some countries are receiving more international attention than others such as Bahrain and Gulf countries where daily abuses remain under the radar and hardly reported.

Women have participated to various degrees in these 'revolutions' and social change movements and have played leading roles in breaking gender stereotypes and reclaiming the public sphere. In particular, young women and men have played an active role in the ways they have been able to use social media to demand change.

The Arab Springs are creating nevertheless opportunities for more equality and women's rights as for instance in the framework of the on-going and upcoming constitutional reforms processes that are underway in which feminist organizations demand that these constitutions be clear on substantive equality and non-discrimination. This said, retaliation against women has been brutal and across the board ranging from rapes to virginity tests to imprisonment and torture, such as in Bahrain.

Simultaneously, the Arab Springs have also been a fertile ground for the emergence of organised religious fundamentalist groups of all kinds. This trend has now swept the region and there is no doubt that, should free elections take place, religious political parties are likely to gain voice, representation, power and influence.

The international community is also playing a significant role in the Arab Spring both in terms of diplomacy as well as direct support and selective media coverage. The Arab spring has created new international interest as well as new funding pots. What are the implications for the peoples of these countries and for women's rights in particular?

Rationale for the conference:

- There is an urgent need to listen to the analysis of feminists and women representatives from the MENA region especially those who are living and witnessing the events and form an integral part of these.
- There is also a need to compare and contrast and learn from previous revolutions and the paths these have taken in relation to women's rights and gender equality.
- The purpose of this collective analysis, comparing and contrasting is for enabling the formulation of informed positioning and political demands as well as assess opportunities and challenges for strategic action in the various context-specific processes.
- It is also important for the active feminists from the MENA region to have voice on the global scene and to be able to shape public opinion.

Main objectives/ issues

The main objectives of the conference will be to discuss risks, possible joint efforts and ways forward to secure a transition that will address women's rights agenda(s) and put social concerns and women's proposals at the core of current important political processes.

We hope for this dialogue to be enriched with perspectives coming from WIDE's members from the ex-communist region; having gone through a very difficult transition process that has affected their participation and prevented their agenda from being put on the table and taken into account. That transition brought dramatic consequences in terms of rights and social and gender justice that the citizens as a whole now face but in particular women (Issue of neo-conservative and neo-liberal ideologies to work together against women's rights).

We also would like to refer to the fact that we know a lot of women organizations have been supported directly through external aid from the EU after the beginning of transition/democratisation processes were soon 'abandoned' to their fate once the transition process was officially 'completed' (drastic funding cuts, massive engagement and then total disengagement with dramatic consequences).

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Programme

27 October 2011	Cross-regional analysis and sharing of experiences
08.30 – 09.30	Registration
09.30 – 09.45	Welcome and Introduction Bénédicte Allaert (WIDE Network) and Lina Abou Habib (CRTD-A)
09.45 – 11.15	Panel 1. Middle East and Northern Africa at a crossroads: "Arab Springs" analysed by key feminist actors from the region <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Sabah Al Hallat, Syrian Women League (NGOs), Syria- Asma Khader, Jordanian National Commission for Women, Jordan- Nadia Ait Zai, Centre de Documentation sur les droits des enfants et des femmes, Algeria- Maria Malmström, WIDE Sweden/GADIP Facilitator: Lina Abou Habib (CRTD-A)
11.15 – 11.45	Coffee Break
11.45 – 13.00	Moderated debate with the audience
13.00 – 14.00	Lunch break
14.00 – 15.30	Panel 2. What if history repeats itself? Revisiting the past – learning for the future: experiences from Iran and Eastern Europe <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Mahnaz Afkhami, Women Learning Partnership, Iran/USA- Alexandra Solik, KARAT Coalition, Poland Facilitator: Juana Bengoa , WIDE Network Moderated discussion with the floor
15.30 – 16.00	Coffee break

16.00 – 17.30	<p>Panel 3. The role of international actors: past, present and future .</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sanja Sarnavka, Be active, Be Emancipated (B.A.B.E),Croatia - Boriana Jonhson, European Feminist Initiative (EFI/IFE), Jordan/France <p>Facilitator: Mayra Moro Coco, AWID</p> <p>Moderated discussion with the floor</p>
28 October 2011	Mobilising and strategizing for women’s rights and gender equality
09.00 – 10.45	<p>Panel 4. Threats, opportunities and entry points for women’s economic, political and social rights - a common agenda</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Zeina Zaatari, Regional Director of MENA at the Global Fund for Women - Esraa Abdel Fattah, April 6 Youth Movement in Egypt - Rabea Naciri, Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc - Maya Morsy, Director UN Women, Egypt <p>Facilitator: Patricia Muñoz Cabrera, WIDE Network</p>
10.45 – 11.00	Coffee break
11.00 – 11.45	<p>Moderated discussion with the floor, with initial intervention of:</p> <p>Chus Gonzalez Garcia - Feminisms Commission from Madrid- 15M Movement, Spain</p>
11.45 – 12.00	<p>Closing Words</p> <p>Bénédicte Allaert (WIDE) and Lina Abou Habib (CRTD-A)</p>
12.00 – 14.00	Lunch included for all registered participants

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