

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

#### Introduction

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?

*WIDE Gratefully acknowledges the support of the EC, HIVOS, Cordaid in conveying this conference.*



### 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/democratization 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).

*WIDE Gratefully acknowledges the support of the EC, HIVOS, Cordaid in conveying this conference.*



**DRAFT AGENDA OF THE CONFERENCE**

**DAY 1: CROSS REGIONAL SHARING OF EXPERIENCES: THE REVOLUTIONS AS LIVED AND ANALYSED BY FEMINISTS**

<p><b>Morning (9-13)</b></p>	<p><b><i>MENA at crossroads: Beyond the mainstream media. How do feminist view the revolutions?</i></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b><i>Chronicle of a revolution foretold: What really happened in Egypt and Tunisia</i></b></li> <li>2. <b><i>The short-lived outburst in Algeria</i></b></li> <li>3. <b><i>Under the Radar: Bahrain “Silence, on tue!”</i></b></li> <li>4. <b><i>Uncertain revolutions &amp; uncertain futures: The cases of Jordan and Yemen</i></b></li> <li>5. <b><i>Experience from Palestine</i></b></li> </ol> <p><b>Followed by moderated discussion with the floor</b></p>
<p><b>Afternoon (14.30-17.30) Parallel sessions</b></p>	<p><b><i>1/ Revisiting the past – Learning for the future</i></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b><i>The Iranian experience: What if history repeats itself?</i></b></li> <li>2. <b><i>Women in transition (experiences from Eastern Europe)</i></b></li> </ol> <p><b>Followed by moderated discussion with the floor</b></p>
	<p><b><i>2/ The role of international actors: past, present and future Analysis of the role of the EU</i></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b><i>Analysis of the role of WB and IMF</i></b></li> <li>2. <b><i>United Nations (for ex UNRWA (refugees); UN Women</i></b>        How does the EU relate to these countries, focusing especially on EU economic, development and migration plans for/ in the region and the realities and initiatives of women’s movements and women’s organisations in the region.</li> </ol>

*WIDE Gratefully acknowledges the support of the EC, HIVOS, Cordaid in conveying this conference.*



**DAY 2: MOBILISING AND STRATEGISING FOR WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY**

<p><b>Morning (9-11)</b></p>	<p><i>Threats, opportunities and entry points for women’s economic and social rights</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Engaging in post-revolution constitutional reforms: Egypt versus Morocco</b></li> <li>2. <b>Emergence of organized religious fundamentalist groups</b></li> <li>3. <b>Voices from Eastern Europe</b></li> </ol> <p><b>Followed by moderated discussion with the floor</b></p>
<p><b>Closure (11.30-13.00)</b></p>	<p><i>The future of women’s civil, social, economic and political rights in the region</i></p> <p>Keynote speaker: Deniz Kandiyoti (tbc)</p>
<p><b>Afternoon (14:30-17:30)</b></p>	<p><i>Strategic planning meeting with WIDE-CRTDA and partners from the region for follow up activities and initiatives*</i></p>

\* Afternoon planning meeting is only open for WIDE members and partners.

WIDE Gratefully acknowledges the support of the EC, HIVOS, Cordaid in conveying this conference.



This conference is supported by the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity – PROGRESS (2007-2013). This programme is implemented by the European Commission, It was established to financially support the implementation of the objectives of the European Union in the employment, social affairs and equal opportunities area, and thereby contribute to the achievement of the Europe 2020 Strategy goals in this fields. The seven-year Programme targets all stakeholders who can shape the development of appropriate and effective employment and social legislation and policies, across the EU-27, EFTA-EEA and EU candidate and pre-candidate countries. For more information see: <http://ec.europa.eu/progress>

### BIOGRAPHIES OF THE SPEAKERS (TBC)

**Amal Abdel Hadi** (Egypt), feminist and human rights activist, is a member of the Steering Committee of the Arab regional coalition "Equality without Reservation" on CEDAW and the planning Committee of Musawah (Equality and Justice in the Muslim Family). She has published and conducted extensive research and advocacy in the field of women's rights, particularly with regard to reproductive health, violence against women, and female genital mutilation. She served on a number of international and regional boards and coalitions, and is a founding member of the New Woman Foundation, the Task Force Against Female Genital Mutilation, and the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights.

**Lina Abou-Habib** (Lebanon) is Executive Director of the Collective for Research and Training on Development–Action (CRTD-A), an organization that works in Lebanon and the MENA region on gender and citizenship, gender and economic rights, and women's leadership and public participation. Ms. Abou-Habib is a co-founder and coordinator of the Machreq/Maghreb Gender Linking and Information Project. She has collaborated with a number of regional and international agencies, as well as public institutions, in mainstreaming gender in development policies and practices and in building capacities for gender mainstreaming. Ms. Abou-Habib serves on the boards of the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) and Gender and Development, is a MENA advisor for the Global Fund for Women, and is on the editorial board of Oxfam's journal, Gender and Development.

**Mahnaz Afkhami** (Iran/USA) is the founder and President of Women's Learning Partnership, Executive Director of the Foundation for Iranian Studies, and former Minister for Women's Affairs in Iran. She serves on advisory boards for Ethical Globalization Initiative, International Museum of Women, World Movement for Democracy, and the Women's Division of Human Rights Watch, among a number of other national and international organizations. Ms. Afkhami has been a leading advocate of women's rights internationally for more than three decades. Her publications include *Muslim Women and the Politics of Participation, Faith and Freedom: Women's Human Rights in the Muslim World*, *Women in Exile*, and *Women and the Law in Iran*. Among the training manuals she has co-authored are *Claiming Our Rights: A Manual for Women's Human Rights Education in Muslim Societies*, *Safe and Secure: Eliminating Violence Against Women and Girls in Muslim Societies*, and *Leading to Choices: A Leadership Training Handbook for Women*.

**Wajeeha Al-Baharna** (Bahrain) is a founding member and vice-president of Bahrain Women Association. She serves on the boards of the Arab Thought Forum, Innovation Cultural Society (Al- Tajdeed), the Arab Network for Non-Governmental Organizations, World Association of Non-Governmental Organizations, and Network of Democrats in the Arab World (NDAW) and is an advisor for Global Fund for Women. She leads the "Nationality Campaign" and is a member of the family law committee in Bahrain, and appears frequently

*WIDE Gratefully acknowledges the support of the EC, HIVOS, Cordaid in conveying this conference.*



*This conference is supported by the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity – PROGRESS (2007-2013). This programme is implemented by the European Commission, It was established to financially support the implementation of the objectives of the European Union in the employment, social affairs and equal opportunities area, and thereby contribute to the achievement of the Europe 2020 Strategy goals in this fields. The seven-year Programme targets all stakeholders who can shape the development of appropriate and effective employment and social legislation and policies, across the EU-27, EFTA-EEA and EU candidate and pre-candidate countries. For more information see: <http://ec.europa.eu/progress>*

on Bahrain TV, Al Jazeera, and Al Manar, speaking to women's issues in the Middle East and Gulf countries. Dr. Al-Baharna holds a PhD in Environmental Management from Madison University and worked as a Marine Biologist in the Public Commission for Protection of Marine Resources and Environment and Wild Life in Bahrain.

**Asma Khader** (Jordan), a lawyer and human rights activist, is General Coordinator of Sisterhood Is Global Institute/Jordan (SIGI/J) and Secretary General of the Jordanian National Commission for Women. She is former Minister of Culture and Government Spokesperson for the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and former President of the Jordanian Women's Union. Elected to the Permanent Arab Court as Counsel on violence against women in 1996, she has served as a judge and chairperson of many judicial bodies specializing in fields related to human rights. A member of the Arab Lawyer's Union, the Arab Organization for Human Rights, the Executive Committee of the International Commission of Jurists, and the Advisory Committee of the Women's Division of Human Rights Watch, she has received numerous awards and honors for her work. She was instrumental in creating a Legal Literacy/Legal Assistance program for Jordanian women, as well as establishing the Jordanian Children's Parliament. Ms. Khader has written and spoken widely on the topics of women, children's rights, and human rights.

**Amina Lemrini** (Morocco) is a Founding Member of both the Moroccan Human Rights Organization (OMDH) and the Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM). She is also a Founding Member and sits on the Board of Directors of Collectif 95 Maghreb-Egalité, a women's regional NGO working in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. She has a PhD in the Science of Education with a focus on human rights education. Amina has lectured and published on a variety of issues dealing with human rights, particularly on the rights of the child and women's rights.

**Rabea Naciri** (Morocco) is a founding member of Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc, one of the largest Moroccan NGOs focused on the rights of women, and the former executive director of Collectif 95 Maghreb Egalité, a network of women's associations and women researchers from Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia committed to preventing violence against women. Rabea is a prominent activist in the Maghreb region and has written extensively on Arab women and poverty, women and Islam, and strategy development for the promotion of women's rights. She is a professor in the Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines at the University of Rabat.

**Nadia Ait Zai** (Algeria) is a jurist and a Professor at the Law Faculty in Algiers. She is the founder of CIDDEF, Centre de Documentation sur le Droit des Enfants et Des Femmes. She has conducted several researches on women's political participation, violence against women as well as women and legal reforms. Nadia is a member of the Collectif Maghreb Egalite and has written and spoken extensively about women's position and rights especially in Algeria.

*WIDE Gratefully acknowledges the support of the EC, HIVOS, Cordaid in conveying this conference.*



*This conference is supported by the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity – PROGRESS (2007-2013). This programme is implemented by the European Commission, It was established to financially support the implementation of the objectives of the European Union in the employment, social affairs and equal opportunities area, and thereby contribute to the achievement of the Europe 2020 Strategy goals in this fields. The seven-year Programme targets all stakeholders who can shape the development of appropriate and effective employment and social legislation and policies, across the EU-27, EFTA-EEA and EU candidate and pre-candidate countries. For more information see: <http://ec.europa.eu/progress>*

**Deniz Kandiyoti** (Turkey/UK) is an author and a researcher in the fields of gender relations and developmental politics in the Middle East, specifically Turkey. She holds a PhD from London School of Economics. Her work on gender and Islam, especially in post-colonial and rural development areas, has been influential throughout the entire field. She has pioneered new research into understanding the implications of Islam and state policy on women, and as a result has brought more attention to the field. Most recently, her research has “returned to exploring the politics of gender in Muslim-majority societies but from an even broader comparative perspective” which involves Afghanistan and Uzbekistan as well as Turkey.

*WIDE Gratefully acknowledges the support of the EC, HIVOS, Cordaid in conveying this conference.*



*This conference is supported by the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity – PROGRESS (2007-2013). This programme is implemented by the European Commission, It was established to financially support the implementation of the objectives of the European Union in the employment, social affairs and equal opportunities area, and thereby contribute to the achievement of the Europe 2020 Strategy goals in this fields. The seven-year Programme targets all stakeholders who can shape the development of appropriate and effective employment and social legislation and policies, across the EU-27, EFTA-EEA and EU candidate and pre-candidate countries. For more information see: <http://ec.europa.eu/progress>*