

**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COUNCIL**

Distr.
LIMITED
E/ESCWA/ECW/2011/WG.5/Report
1 March 2012
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: ARABIC

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**REPORT****FORUM OF YOUNG WOMEN AND MEN IN THE ARAB UPRISINGS:
AGENTS OF CHANGE ON THE ROAD TO DEMOCRACY
CAIRO, 16 AND 17 OCTOBER 2011****Summary**

The Forum of Young Women and Men, held in Cairo on 16 and 17 October 2011, was organized by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in coordination with UN-Women and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The Forum addressed a number of key themes that were closely linked with the popular movements, including the equality of citizens. Experts presented their perspectives on a number of key issues, and young male and female activists shared their experience and expertise. This report highlights the main points raised by Forum participants.

Participants in the Forum included activists involved in the popular uprisings that have taken place in certain Arab countries, as well as experts, intellectuals and activists from civil society and United Nations bodies in Egypt.

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Introduction

1. In the light of emerging popular movements that are redefining the political, social and structural parameters of the countries of the region, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), UN-Women and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, organized the Forum of Young Women and Men in the Arab Uprisings: Agents of Change on the Road to Democracy, which was held in Egypt on 16 and 17 October 2011. During the civil society forum on “Arab Uprisings and Prospects for Renaissance“, held in Beirut on 25 and 26 August 2011, participants from Libya and Yemen requested that ESCWA organize a forum for young men and young women. The Forum was held to study the participation of women in the popular movements in Arab countries and the impact of those movements on the advancement of women. The Forum also aimed to create a communication network of young male and female activists, to provide an opportunity for them to share their knowledge of successful experiences, and to learn from those with relevant expertise.

I. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

2. The Forum achieved the following results:

(a) Identified common features and critical issues to activate the role of young participants in popular movements;

(b) Emphasized the peaceful nature of popular movements, despite the intensification of violence by regimes;

(c) Developed the network of activists by establishing a group page on the social networking website *Facebook*.

3. The young people who participated in the closed-door meeting agreed to do the following:

(a) Establish a media network along the lines of the Rassd News Network (RNN), to document the situation in countries where uprisings have occurred;

(b) Establish a group on the social networking website *Facebook* to promote the networking and communication of activists;

(c) Draw up a paper, to be published on the youth website, detailing the salient points that were discussed by the participants;

(d) Promote a youth initiative to draw up a comprehensive social and economic vision;

(e) Study corruption and how to address it, given that the problem originated in politics and finance and has become more widespread, and corrupted values have a sweeping impact on society.

II. TOPICS DISCUSSED AND STUDIED

4. The Forum opened with a presentation by Ms. Michelle Bachelet, Executive Director of UN-Women and former President of the Republic of Chile, on revolutions and youth activism. She opened a discussion on the Arab uprisings that provided an opportunity for others, particularly young men and young women, to share their experiences.

5. In her remarks at the opening of the session, she reviewed her experience in the struggle to end dictatorship and restore democracy in Chile. She then discussed her experience with the youth participants in the Forum.

6. The meeting focused on 5 themes: (1) the equality of citizens; (2) Arab activists' experiences; (3) the transition to democracy: social, political and legislative challenges; (4) economic challenges in the transition to democracy; and (5) the role of donors and multilateral financial institutions.

A. EQUALITY OF CITIZENS

7. The Forum brought together young men and women in a closed discussion of the priorities for a road map for the future and ways to enhance the role of young people in the next phase of popular movements and uprisings. The discussion was moderated by Ms. Mona Rishmawi, Chief, Rule of Law, Equality and Non-Discrimination Branch, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and participants discussed three key issues relating to achieving the equality of citizens, namely: the challenges that women face concerning citizenship; the role of media and information technology; and the role of religious and military authorities in establishing a modern civil State based on equality.

8. Ms. Hanan Rabbani, Consultant, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and Senior Program Officer for Women's Rights, Open Society Foundations, presented a paper on Arab women and democratization: challenges and prospects for the achievement of equality and citizenship. In her presentation, she outlined the key challenges that women have faced while participating in political upheavals and that they may face in the future during periods of transition or in the process to establish modern Arab societies. During political upheavals, women and men have had to deal with systematic repression. Women have also been the victims of gender-based abuse, including virginity tests and attacks. There is a danger that women will be excluded from decision-making positions when key documents are drafted for post-revolutionary States (including the Constitution and the electoral law), and that issues relating to women's rights will be ignored or marginalized.

9. In her presentation on Women, Culture, the Media and Information Technology, Ms. Khawla Mattar, Director of the United Nations Information Centre in Cairo, Egypt, underlined how young people and women are marginalized within the media landscape. She acknowledged the important contribution of new media and social networking websites during periods of political upheaval, and warned against non-critical engagement with the media. She stressed that the claim that these revolutions were based around social networking websites is unfair, as that does not recognize the active contribution made on the ground by young men and women.

10. Mr. Nour Farahat, Professor of the philosophy of law and constitutional jurisprudence, spoke about the role of religious and military authorities in democratic Arab countries, focusing on the post-revolutionary roles of military and religious establishments. His talk included an explanation of the roles of the two establishments, and, in the light of discussions about civilian States, raised questions regarding how to foster their involvement and the feasibility of doing so.

B. EXPERIENCES OF ARAB COUNTRIES IN THE POPULAR MOVEMENTS: ACTIVISTS' PERSPECTIVES

11. This round-table discussion was moderated by Ms. Shahida El-Baz, Director of the Arab and African Research Centre. She began with an overview of women's roles during and following the uprisings, and reviewed the challenges women faced: their sacrifices during the uprisings were ignored, and they were requested not to participate. Ms. El-Baz stressed the need for a social vision from the start of a rebellion, and for rebels to be provided with support. She also stressed that women and young people had a critical role to play.

12. Taking the floor, the young men and women expressed their concerns as individuals within movements that had emerged under each country's particular conditions.

(a) A Bahraini activist listed some of the achievements pertaining to women and the critical roles they played in political movements. Women's participation in economic and political life had been strengthened both in terms of the law, through affirmative action and the establishment of quotas, and in society by working to change prevailing opinions and behaviour in connection with the roles of women and men;

(b) A Libyan activist pointed out that a lack of institutions in Libya under the former regime meant that Libyans were faced with a range of challenges, including chaotic conditions and the need to establish institutions;

(c) A Tunisian activist underlined that it was important to remain vigilant as former regimes remained active, even if those at the top had departed or stepped down. Young men and women who were engaged in revolutions must persevere and safeguard the achievements of the revolution;

(d) A spokesperson from Egypt underlined the importance of safeguarding the achievements of the revolution, and indicated that the movement continued to enjoy considerable popular support although enthusiasm for the revolution had begun to wane;

(e) A Yemeni activist discussed the participation of women in the revolution while detailing the facts surrounding the death of a colleague who had participated in the demonstrations;

(f) A participant from Morocco emphasized that the role of young men and women in their rebellion constituted part of the Arab spring, even though the rebellion took a different course in Morocco;

(g) A participant from Palestine discussed the importance of emphasizing human and women's rights violations in Palestine as critical issues, even if they were considered issues of secondary importance when compared with the Israeli occupation.

C. THE TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY: SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND LEGISLATIVE CHALLENGES

13. The discussion in this session was moderated by Ms. Maya Morsy, UN-Women Country Coordinator for Egypt. This session focused on the challenges Arab countries face in the transition to democracy.

14. Mr. Raghid el-Solh, author, expert on regional integration and consultant at the Issam Fares Center for Eastern Mediterranean Studies, presented a paper on regional and international powers and the Arab uprisings. He focused on international challenges in the context of countries' relations and interests at the global and regional levels, and drew attention to key problems and challenges for Arab movements for change at the international level. Engaged in a bitter struggle to achieve their goals, those movements require international and regional allies. He warned that, in return for providing support and backing to movements for change in the region, those allies expected to be handsomely rewarded, should the movement for change ever come to power. Movements for change that provide such assurances and receive regional or international support may be unable to safeguard national interests or the gains they achieved. He asked the participants if they believe that foreign powers intervened in a country to support the transition from tyranny and strengthen democracy, or to maintain the status quo, namely the country's subservience and internal tyranny, but with minor changes and improvements in the situation of women or young people as components of society.

15. Mr. Haytham Manna, a human and civil rights activist, addressed the issue of safeguarding social cohesion during and following uprisings. He stressed the importance of safeguarding social cohesion from Arab dictatorships, which have undermined civil society while encouraging the use of group membership labels that preceded the advent of civil society, such as clan, tribe, sect and religion. He reviewed the course of the revolution in the Syrian Arab Republic, where, before they had proposed any concepts or plan of action, young people had succeeded in overcoming a barrier of fear. He pointed out that, from the very start,

young people had succeeded in impressing the world and the security services with their call for demonstrations to be civilized and dignified. Tens of thousands celebrated their freedom, carrying banners with slogans such as “No Muslim Brothers or Salafis, we want a civil State“. In this revolution, every person was vital and had a role to play; “the people“ was an expression used to describe a national and democratic entity that was both integrated and harmonious. He explained that the key methods of safeguarding social cohesion necessitated non-violent self-defence and non-violent defence of civil society as a whole.

16. Ms. Tahani al-Gebali, Vice-President of the Supreme Constitutional Court, presented a paper on the constitutional and legislative challenges in the transition to democracy. She underlined the fact that young people have adopted strategic thinking as revolutions have overturned constitutional legitimacy, despite the organic link between the Constitution and social, political and economic issues. Revolutionary groups must have an action plan for the phase following the success of the revolution, and must understand the importance of involving a diverse range of stakeholders at the national level and their role in safeguarding the revolution’s achievements. She showed how the various roles were intertwined and reviewed views on the role of political Islam and claims that a State and institutional vacuum was present.

D. THE TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY: ECONOMIC AND DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES

17. This session was moderated by Ms. Karima Korayem, Professor of Economics at the University of Cairo. Dr. Nader Fergany, director of the Almishkat Centre for Research and Training, Cairo, presented a paper on past policy mistakes. He underlined the importance of the development context in efforts to achieve a humanitarian renaissance. Outmoded economic approaches could not be maintained and could not be made more palatable with mere talk about social justice: action was required. Development had failed because of an alliance between despotism and unrestrained capitalism. To weaken that alliance, countries must protect competition through antitrust measures and use taxation mechanisms to achieve distributive justice in society. People wanted development approaches that safeguarded the right of all to live in dignity and with respect. That required an honourable, democratic system of governance in which rulers and officials were held responsible for their actions. He explained that development aimed to establish strong and diverse production mechanisms; production must be fostered through improvements in education and training, and an effective approach to research and development that ensured access to the knowledge-based age. He stated that an equitable and efficient economy must combat monopolies, entrench distributive justice and safeguard human dignity; and that it requires wide and effective social safety nets and more wide-ranging freedoms.

18. In his statement on social justice and the new model for development, Mr. Fawwaz Traboulsi, a politician and university professor, addressed the link between Arabs and democratic concepts. He explained that the revolutions had demonstrated conclusively that it was a fallacy to claim that Islam was incompatible with democracy. Young people had proven that democracy was a radical change in the relationship between rulers and the people: democracy was, in itself, a revolution and a fundamental transformation in relations established by regimes.

19. Mr. Mohammad Tarbush, a political and financial analyst discussed how to deal with corruption and recover lost assets. He discussed the issue of public funds embezzled by rulers and deposited in bank accounts abroad; such funds were difficult to trace and there are many ways to hide the identity of the account holder. Once the owner’s identity was established, it was relatively easy to recover those funds by invoking international and bilateral conventions on judicial cooperation that provided for the freezing of accounts and fund recovery, even when that took considerable time and involved complex and difficult mechanisms. Rampant financial corruption not only deprived States of underlying assets, but also deprived them of revenue that could have resulted from investments and other economic activity had those assets been used on behalf of the people and the State, as well as compound revenue thereon. Economists estimated that such revenue was equivalent to ten times the value of underlying assets. Financial corruption led to utter apathy towards country-level issues, and while sectors of the economy could stay competitive if provided

with minimal support and commitment from the State, total dominance over those sectors of the economy created a sense of powerlessness.

E. THE ROLE OF DONORS AND MULTILATERAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

20. Ms. Rima Khalaf, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ESCWA, moderated the closing session which addressed the role of donors in supporting revolutions. Participants reviewed the topics raised during the previous sessions and other matters.

21. Ms. Hania Sholkamy, a professor and researcher at the Social Research Center at the American University in Cairo, spoke about the impact of the revolutions on funding from abroad. A return to normal in the political arena was linked to groups renouncing development rhetoric in order to safeguard their room to manoeuvre and their ability to choose between political action and development work; such groups would then be free to develop a political or development identity, including in connection with women's issues. She questioned the position of donors towards those objectives, the relationship between civil society and donors, how the issue of dependency could be overcome and how to lay the foundations of a new development initiative.

22. Mr. Wael Gamal, Economic Researcher and Chief Editor at *Al-Shorouk* newspaper reviewed the role of civil society, activists and bloggers, who had become particularly important during the Arab uprisings, the interest of donors these groups attracted, and attempts to establish social and professional networks with them. He addressed some of the key problems in the relationship between donors and members of civil society, including dependency issues and the withdrawal of support if that was in the interests of donors.

23. The participants highlighted a number of key issues. These included: sectarian and religious problems in revolutions and popular movements; political Islam and its impact on the formulation of future plans, its compatibility with democratic principles, and its position with regard to women and public freedoms; mechanisms to recover lost funds and funds that had been smuggled out of the country; the impact of the media and its role in misleading public opinion or supporting revolutions; the role of women in the Arab revolutions and how those revolutions would affect the role of women in Arab societies in the future; and the role of regional and international forums in supporting revolutions. The participants came to the following main conclusions:

(a) Although certain foreign media outlets paid some attention to the participation of women, some Arab satellite channels did not show women participants in the demonstrations and popular movements unless they were Islamic activists. In media discourse, expressions were used that reflected biased and misogynistic attitudes. For example, media singled out women when reporting deaths of demonstrators. It was also noted that women had failed to get their agendas adopted by political forces despite the prominent part they had played in revolutions;

(b) Revolutions reflected the peoples' rejection of outmoded concepts and their desire to break through stereotypical ways of thinking. Those revolutions must be completed;

(c) Young people are weighed down by too many meetings and revolutions are becoming bureaucratic;

(d) Parties exploited young people in order to implement their policies and did not engage with them as partners in the decision-making process. As a result, young people were marginalized, as they had been prior to the revolutions;

(e) Societies need media that refutes discourses that attempted to undermine the revolution and its achievements, whether originating internally or abroad.

24. At the conclusion of the Forum, the Executive Secretary of ESCWA invited male and female activists to take part in a closed round-table discussion to foster future communication and networking.

III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. VENUE AND DATES OF THE MEETING

25. The meeting was held at the Marriott Hotel, Cairo on 16 and 17 October 2011.

B. OPENING

26. The Forum was opened by Ms. Michelle Bachelet, Executive Director of UN-Women and former President of the Republic of Chile, who spoke about her experiences in the struggle to combat dictatorship and restore democracy. Ms. Bachelet's speech made a particular impact on the young people; like them, she had entered politics as an activist and was arrested with her husband and father, who later died in prison. She held ministerial posts in several Chilean governments before being elected President of the country. The presentation was based on her personal experience, and she made a series of suggestions to the young men and women, including that constant efforts must be made to ensure the unity of democratic forces, that constitutional rules for the transitional period must be agreed upon and that institution-building must be carried out strategically. She asserted that democracy was synonymous with peace, fostered growth and prosperity, and reinforced the concept of justice.

27. In her discussion with the young men and women, she stated that Arab young people had provided the world with an inspiring model. In particular, young women defied the stereotype of women as subjugated victims: they went out onto the streets in order to affirm their dignity and strive for a better life where social justice and democracy would be upheld. Answering their questions, she emphasized that each revolution is unique and that inclusive dialogue plays a key role. She explained that, like other revolutionaries in Chile, she had been obliged to sit down with enemies of the revolution, particularly with members of the army, and engage in dialogue with them because they were all citizens subject to the law. She emphasized the fact that while the revolution provided no guarantees, the democratic process was, in itself, the guarantee.

28. She drew attention to the important roles that women would play during the next phase in leadership and decision-making positions and concerning social issues. She said that UN-Women wished to contribute in periods of transition, particularly in terms of women's empowerment and equality within society. UN-Women had established a fund to support projects to enhance the status of women and girls. The fund provides grants of between US\$200,000 and US\$1 million for projects of one to three years' duration. She said that projects proposals would be accepted between 24 October and 4 November 2011, and the winners would be announced on 28 December 2011.

C. ATTENDANCE

29. Participants in the Forum of Young Women and Men included male and female activists involved in popular uprisings that have taken place in certain Arab countries, along with experts, intellectuals and activists from civil society and United Nations bodies in Egypt. The full list of participants is annexed to the present report.

D. AGENDA

30. The experts addressed the agenda items listed below:

1. Opening.
2. First session: Equality of citizens.
3. Round table discussion: Arab countries' experiences in the popular movements.
4. Second session: Transition to democracy: social, political and legislative challenges.
5. Third session: Transition to democracy: economic challenges.

Annex*

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

A. EXPERTS

Ms. Hanan Rabani
Consultant, Office of the High Commissioner for
Human Rights

Ms. Khawla Matar
Director of the United Nations Information Centre
in Cairo

Mr. Nour Farhat
Professor of the philosophy of law and
constitutional jurisprudence

Ms. Shahida El-Baz
Director of the Arab and African Research Centre

Mr. Raghid El-Solh
Author and expert on regional integration and
consultant at the Issam Fares Center for Eastern
Mediterranean Studies

Mr. Haytham Manna
Human and civil rights activist

Ms. Tahani Al Gebali
Vice president of the constitutional court

Ms. Karima Korayem
Professor of economics at the university of Cairo

Mr. Nader Fergany
Director of the Almishkat centre for research and
training

Mr. Fawaz Traboulsi
Politician and university professor

Mr. Mohammad Tarbush
Political and financial analyst

Ms. Hania Sholkamy
Professor and researcher at the social research
centre at the American university in Cairo

Mr. Wael Gamal
Economic researcher and chief editor
at Al Shorouk

B. ACTIVISTS

Tunisia

Mr. Malek Al Saghiri
Ms. Wafa Frawes
Mr. Hafez Al Gharbi
Ms. Salsabil Bilhaj Ali
Ms. Sophia Al Hamami

Syrian Arab Republic

Mr. Ahmad Al Masri
Mr. Ahmad Al Mahamid
Ms. Rabab Hajj Hussein
Mr. Fakhri Salim Zanjir
Mr. Hussein Hamade Gharir
Ms. Azza Al Bahra
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Mr. Ali Al Rijal
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Ms. Doaa Kassem
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* Issued as submitted.

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Ms. Hoda Madi
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Ms. Naziha El Turki
Ms. Yara Tata Naki
Mr. Youssef Ibrahim Mohammad Abou Alim
Mr. Altwati Saleh El Abed
Ms. Ghada Abdel Hafiz Abdel Hamid
Ms. Noujoud Lanki
Ms. Nadia Al Mourabet
Ms. Ghada Al Baabaa
Ms. Zainab El Zaidi

Yemen

Mr. Fareh El Mousilmi
Ms. Bushra Al Maktiri
Mr. Fahed Ahmad Alkan
Mr. Salel Awad Bin Mubarak

Bahrain

Ms. Mona Fadel
Mr. Moustafa Al Zarki
Ms. Dalal Moussa
Ms. Manar Al Hamadi
Mr. Ghassan Serhan
Ms. Amal Jaafar Al Samikh
Ms. Alaa Shehabi

C. ORGANIZERS

ESCWA

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Chief of the Centre for Women

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Regional Advisor

Ms. Maha Yahya
Regional Advisor

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Special assistant to the Executive Secretary

Ms. Marie Rose Zalzal
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