

Equality without Reservation

A Statement regarding the situation and rights of women amidst the transformations in the Arab region:

A call for ceasing violence and for a large scale social dialogue on equality and citizenship rights

July 2013

During its last meeting which was held in Cairo on July 27th 2013, **Equality without Reservation Coalition (EWRC)**, a coalition of feminist organizations from Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia Jordan and Bahrain, discussed the developments and transformations that have swept the region since the start of the Arab revolts in December 2010, their impact on women and on the position of women in the current political arena.

These events which started in 2010 have indeed generated great hopes and strengthened the power and effectiveness of the social and women movements calling for change and for freedom as well as for embracing equality, justice and dignity.

The region continues to witness increasing violence with an escalating toll of death and destruction and the decline of the political discourse calling for citizenship rights and equality. This is now posing a serious threat to all hopes generated by the Arab revolutions.

In addition, most countries in transition, have witnessed an increased level of intervention by regional and international powers and aiming to divert the direction of these popular movements and to align them with the interests of these powers. These interventions have furthered the rift both at the political and community level and have led to internal wars and strife amongst all parties involved in what is commonly referred to as the "Arab Spring".

The Coalition also notes that quite early on in the journey of the Arab revolts, the Islamist and conservative discourse began gaining voice and space and succeeded in filling the overall political void to the extent that it overpowered the discourse calling for inclusive citizenship, civil state, social and civil rights and full equality amongst all citizens.

Indeed, and given their strong organizational base, conservative Islamist parties have been able to accede to the front row positions in many an Arab country namely Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Yemen and Libya. These now share the scene with other Jihadists and fundamentalist Islamic groups well known for their conservative positions towards social issues as well as for their extreme political practices. The coming to power of Islamist parties was accompanied by an increase of violence against and exclusion of women and minority groups who were largely marginalized from the political domain, a situation which is characterized by increased sectarian violence.

In view of the above, and based on the values and beliefs of its member organizations, **Equality without Reservation Coalition** calls on all international and regional parties to put an end to violence and to the influx of armed Jihadists fighters which have caused devastating effects, shattering safety and security, and relegating women to a sub-citizen status. Women's suffering is increasing in many countries of the region as a result of armed conflict and growing conservatism and fundamentalism, as they become the target of all forms of violence including physical, mental, economic and social violence.

Equality without Reservation Coalition also calls for genuine and inclusive national dialogue to take place across the region and for the inclusion of women and all sections of society. The Coalition also calls on all women and civil society organizations to actively engage in such national dialogues and to include gender equality and social justice as fundamental priorities in their agendas.

Finally, **Equality without Reservation Coalition** reiterates its demands for an end of all forms of discrimination against all women and for the realization of a civil state based on the rule of law, gender equality and a fulfillment of equal civil, social, economic and political rights for all women and men. The Coalition maintains that the reform of national Constitutions must be based on the supremacy of international human rights instruments whilst transitional governments need to put in place effective and transparent implementation mechanisms which will allow women to fully participate in nation building processes and in redrafting of new Constitutions.