
Human Rights Council

Distr.: General
23 May 2011

Original: English

MUNSA XVI

30 November – 2 December 2011

Agenda item 1

The Protection and Provision of Political Rights in the Middle East and North Africa

Report of the Chair

I. Statement of the Problem

1. As of April 2011 young people (aged between 15 and 29) in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) constituted about 1/3 of the regions total population. In addition, the MENA region also has the second highest population growth after Sub-Saharan Africa [1]. These rises in youthful populations, coupled with large rates of unemployment have led to the creation of a sound environment for political change in the MENA region.

2. The youthful generation of the MENA region have gained great exposure to international media and new technological capabilities (laptops, cell phones, internet, etc.), as well as social networking capacities (Facebook, Twitter etc.). The advents of these initiatives have given people the means to communicate with others and coordinate events, such as protests, with rapid ease and agility [2].

3. The majority of MENA nations are not democratic in nature [3]. According to Freedom Houses 2011 publication on Freedom in the World, 19 nations in the region, with the exception of Israel, were either declared unfree or partly free [4]. Nations given an unfree status are characterized by a blatant lack of democratic principles [5]. These nations received the same ratings for Freedom of Press. The regions consistent history of autocratic rule and media censorship has led many people to protest against their governments and demand political and economic reforms [5].

4. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world, whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech

and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people [6]. Many stipulations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, under which all people (and Middle Eastern people in particular) are entitled to, have come under attack and violation. It is the Human Rights Councils duty to uphold such rights [7].

II. History of the Problem

5. In January of 1978 the nation of Iran, backed at this point in time by the United States, experienced anti-shah demonstrations that eventually turned into a full blown revolution. The Shah, who led the nation as an authoritarian ruler, used extensive measures to try to contain the political changes against his regime including the usage of police and military to shoot protesters, the administration of martial law, and the detainment and torture of opposition leaders. The massive violations of human rights and political and economic oppression eventually led the Shah to flee in February of 1979 and Iran to transform into an Islamic republic. Today Iranian citizens continue to be plagued by censorship and oppression by their current theocratic government [8].

6. In the summer of 2009 Iran experienced another revolutionary phenomenon. Proceeding the re-election of ultra-conservative President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets in what became known as the Green Movement over allegations that the elections had been rigged in Ahmadinejads favor. The theocratic government quickly quashed the dissenters by shooting protesters, holding mass trials, and also resorting to torture, jail sentences, and even summary execution. Although initially unsuccessful the rebellion was soon became a milestone in the role that technology would play in future political changes and demonstrations in the MENA region [9].

7. In January of 2011 the small North African nation of Tunisia experienced what would later become known as the Jasmine Revolution. After years of corruption, graft, and authoritarian rule under President of 23 years, Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, Tunisia was rocked by massive demonstrations led by unemployed and frustrated youth. Ben Ali fled the country a few weeks after. Although Tunisia is now trying to find its bearings among an interim-government, the ruling political party of Ben Ali still holds significant political, economic, and press power, as other political parties such as the Tunisian Communist Party, and Islamist parties continue to remain outlawed [10].

8. Following the Tunisian Revolution droves of Egyptians began to protest the 30 year rule of then President Hosni Mubarak. After 18 days of demonstrations in Cairos Tahrir Square and the death of over 700 people Hosni Mubarak stepped down from power. However, months after Mubaraks fall, the Egyptian Army is in power, Mubaraks security forces remain active, and demonstrators who are continuing to protest have come under attack [11].

9. Several similar cries for reforms in Syria and Bahrain have not fared as well as those in Egypt. Many times peaceful protesters have been met by security forces, curfews, and false promises of change. Some of these nations, such as Yemen and Bahrain, have close ties with the U.S. government who have been less outspoken about the violation of Human Rights laws. This rings true for the international world as countries like Yemen may be engulfed in terrorist activities if order isnt maintained by the state [12].

10. Although demonstrations have been the staple of change among the MENA region, some nations, like Libya, have been dragged into all out civil war. After weeks of brutal crackdown by Libyas regime, many Libyans opposed to the regime have taken up arms in

Libya's eastern provinces to fight its oppressive leader. However, the absence of a diplomatic solution has only led to more death and destruction, as well as violation of international treaties [13].

III. Potential Solutions

11. The task of protecting and developing essential political rights in a region that has for decades ignored them is not an easy one. The fact that the styles of political change throughout the region are not uniform will only complicate this task. One should always be aware of the fact that the Human Rights Council can only make recommendations on human rights violations, and cannot take direct action upon them. These are some questions that delegates should address while assessing potential solutions:

- How democratic is your nation, and what are its stances on political rights? [14]
- What kinds of freedoms of expression do your citizens possess? Why?
- What history has your nation had with governmental strife and reform? If your nation has had political reforms what were they, and why?
- What kind of involvement has your nation had within the Middle East? What kind of political ties does it have with MENA nations?

IV. Position and Research Tips

12. It is essential that delegates remain loyal to their nations positions. Consider the following questions when determining position:

- Has your nation come out in support of the governments, or demonstrators in recent events?
- Is your nation located in the MENA region, or have strong ties with a nation in the MENA region?
- What is your nation's prior history on the Human Rights Council?

Useful Web Sources

- <<http://global.nytimes.com/>>
- <<http://www.bbc.com/>>
- <<http://www.cnn.com/>>

V. Note to Delegates

I would personally like to thank you all before hand for committing your time and effort to addressing this crucial topic. It is my sincerest hope that our committee will achieve strong solutions and that this background paper will be of assistance to you. However, I cannot stress enough the importance of following current events in the Middle East in relation to this topic. As you probably are aware of this issue is bound to change and develop before MUNSA so as a delegate the Chair stresses that you stay up to date. I look forward to viewing all of your different opinions and ideas and think that we will all walk away from this with beneficial experience.

Miguel Guevara

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