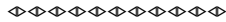


**Statement of Civil Society NGOs and Actors to the
"Forum for the Future"**

Rabat Declaration

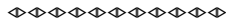
**Towards an Equal Partnership for Democracy,
Human Rights, Fair Peace and Economic
and Social Development**



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Rabat Declaration

**Towards an Equal Partnership for Democracy,
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Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)

CIHRS is a professional, non-governmental research center specialized in the study of human rights in the Arab world. CIHRS was founded in April 1993 and has started its activities in April 1994. The institute views itself as part of the international and Arab human rights movement.

CIHRS does not affiliate with any kind of political activities, and cooperates with other institutions on equal basis in all matters pertaining to human rights.

CIHRS activities include conceptual, and applied research educational programs, seminars, periodical and non-periodical publications as well as providing research facilities and consultations to interested researchers.

Executive Director

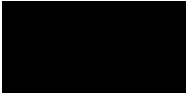
Magdi el- Na'im

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Bahey el- din Hassan



**The Civil Society holds a Conference
parallel to the "G8 Forum for the
Future" On Reform in the Arab World**

Press Release

30 November 2004

The Moroccan capital, Rabat hosts on 8th and 9th December 2004 the civil meeting parallel to the "G8 Forum for the Future" organized by the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies in cooperation with the Moroccan Organization for Human Rights, the International Federation for Human Rights and the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network. It will be attended by 60 participants from the civil society NGOs and actors from 15 Arab states, 9 international organizations and representatives of 4 Asian and European NGOs. It is sponsored by the World Bank and the European Commission.

It is noteworthy that the "Forum for the Future" was launched last June upon an initiative by the latest G8 Summit as periodical meeting on the ministerial level to coordinate dialogue between the countries of the G8 and the broader Middle East adding to the Arab states: Pakistan, Afghanistan and Turkey. Such dialogue tackles political, economic, social and educational re-

form. The Forum held a preliminary meeting in New York last September. The first official meeting will be held in Morocco on 10th and 11th December 2004.

The parallel meeting aims at launching a new mechanism for proceeding with the process of reform and enhancing human rights in the region. This is alongside other mechanism in which the civil society plays an activating role e.g. the mechanisms of the United Nations and the Euro-Mediterranean and African partnership. The civil society should play an effective role in such a mechanism in order to render it the most effective as possible. Priority on the agenda of the forum would be given to the issues of political reform and human rights. Moreover, it allows a chance for dialogue with the Arab governments, the majority of which reject dialogue with the civil society locally or on the regional level within the framework of the Arab League.

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The conference of the civil society underlines the lessons learnt from other region resembling the Arab world regarding reform. The year 2004 will be evaluated regarding the best and worst practices on the track of reform and the means enhance the role of the civil society and the international community in enhancing reform and human rights in the Arab world. The recommendations of the conference will be

presented to the first official meeting of the Forum for the Future.

It is noteworthy that this conference complements the series of conferences held by the civil society institutions on reform over the year. The most distinguished of which was the First Civil Forum. The Forum was organized by the CIHRS in Beirut in March 19-22 2004, in cooperation with the Association for Defending Rights and Freedoms (ADL) and the Palestinian Human Rights Organization (Rights) and in coordination with the EMHRN and the FIDH with the participation of 87 participants representing 52 NGOs from 13 Arab states in addition to 13 observers from 10 countries. The Forum issued the "Second Independence" initiative including the recommendations of the civil society in a number of important issues regarding reform. Besides, there was a conference held in Cairo July 5-7, 2004 organized by the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights and the Al Siyassa Al Dawlia Journal. It was attended by 100 participants from 15 Arab states and concluded a document entitled: "Priorities and Mechanisms of Reform in the Arab World". Both documents in addition to a third one issued by the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, the International Federation for Human Rights and the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network last June on the occasion

of the EU-US summit. Such are the documents upon which the Rabat conference is prepared so that it would be a continuation of the strenuous efforts of the civil society on the issue of reform.

Worth-mentioning is that the Beirut Conference held in March 2004 was held parallel to the Arab summit and sent its recommendations to the Arab kings and presidents and the Secretariat of the Arab League. Attached to the said documents was a request to present the recommendations to the Tunis Summit meeting and to involve the civil society representatives as observers. However, it was not approved. Furthermore, Tunisia had rejected hosting the Civil Forum. The Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies is yet to receive the reply of the Algerian government regarding a request sent months ago to allow holding a meeting parallel to the forthcoming Arab summit in Algeria March 2005. Moreover, the by-laws of the Arab League do not allow the participation of non-governmental organizations in its meetings unless the governments concerned approve the application- a unique procedure in the Arab world.



On the World Human Rights Day
Is reforming the Arab Regime
intangible?!

Press Release

December 9, 2004

World annual celebration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, issued 56 years ago, is an important occasion on which the governments are keen to emphasize their adherence to the respect of such rights. Many of such governments attempt to seize the opportunity to improve their human rights records, whether through adopting legislative reforms for enhancing human rights in their countries or declaring timed plans of action. The latter would introduce such governments to the public opinion and the international community as being keen on achieving tangible improvement in the respect of human rights of the citizens.

On this occasion, the undersigned organizations regretfully declare that the Arab governments, severally or collectively, reject responding to any calls for comprehensive reform whether from inside or outside the Arab world. Likewise, they reject improving the deteriorating conditions of public freedoms and human rights in the region. Democracy has

spread all over the world and replaced despotic totalitarian regimes since the 1980s.

The official trends of the Arab regimes were translated during the year of "reform" into further deterioration in the situation of human rights. Even Bahrain, which had taken several strides on the route of reform, fed up with the critics; the authorities detained the director of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, closed the center and detained dozens of those who expressed solidarity with him.

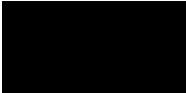
Harassments of human rights defenders all over the world continued in several countries, particularly Syria, Tunisia and Egypt. Reformist discourse in Saudi Arabia was practically implemented in detention of the reform advocates and bringing them to trial. As the official discourse of the Egyptian government preached about reform, the ruling party and the government rejected discussion of constitutional reform and the calls for plurality in the forthcoming elections. Furthermore, arbitrary and collective detentions continued and affected thousands in the wake of the terrorist explosions in Taba. The practice of torture mushroomed as well as sexual abuse of men and women alike in a manner not so different from that of Abu Ghraib jail as reported by the satellite channels and international reports.

Libya witnessed showers of glimmering

promises of reform and ended the year by imprisoning 83 of the prisoners of conscience arrested since 1998 - for suspicion of being affiliates of an Islamic group there known as Muslim Brothers. Two university professors were sentenced to be executed.

In Tunisia, the authorities persisted in the farcical presidential elections lacking constitutionality without knowing the court rulings regarding the amendments made to the Constitution authorizing the president to be re-elected. Moreover, such amendments guaranteed non accountability or judicial questioning of the president after the term of office.

In the light of such indications of the gap between the Arab world and the aspirations for democracy and reform, the undersigned organizations emphasize that such aspirations are principally conditional on a wider mobilization of coalitions among political currents aspiring for reform and the civil society NGOs within a framework of a program for joint work to identified according to the priorities of reform in each country.



Which role for the Civil Society in the Forum for the Future?

Press Release

December 10, 2004

The Conference of the civil society parallel to the "Forum for the Future" ended its proceedings in Rabat yesterday. It concluded recommendations and a comprehensive document on the demands of reform in the Arab world and the comments of the civil society on the initiative of the G8 and the Forum for the Future to be presented to the Forum today.

The delegation of the civil society to the Forum for the Future consisted of 7 members, two of whom forcibly did not appear, namely: the head of the International Organization for Criminal Reform, Ahmed Othmani and the head of the Committees for the Defense of Human Rights in Syria, Aktham Naissa. The former died after a grievous accident on the evening of the first day of the conference and the Syrian government did not allow the latter to travel. They were added to the delegation in honor of their struggles for reform and enhancement of human rights. The participating members are:

- 1- Amna Abu Ayaash: the Moroccan Organization for Human Rights
- 2- Bahey El-Din Hassan: Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
- 3- Charles Odwan: the Lebanese Transparency Organization
- 4- Morad Allal: coordinator of the Euro-Mediterranean Civil Forum
- 5- Nihad Abyl Qomsaan: the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights

The conference was held in Rabat, December 8-9 upon an initiative by the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, the Moroccan Organization for Human Rights, the International Federation for Human Rights and the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network. It was attended by civil society NGOs and actors from 13 Arab countries with the participation of 9 international organizations. The conference was held based on the pursuit of dialogue with all the international, regional and national parties relevant, whether governmental or non-governmental. Such dialogue is always pursued by the civil society NGOs. The conference was also held for providing positive interaction with the G8 initiative on reform in the Arab world and presenting proposals and recommendations to the first official meeting of the Forum for the Future.

The recommendations of the conference underscored the following:

- 1- The civil society NGOs and actors firmly believe that the process of reform in the Arab world is an internal affair to be undertaken by all the national, governmental or non-governmental, actors aspiring for real reform to fulfill the peoples' aspirations for progress, development, democracy, human rights, security and peace. However, they condemn the attempts to forcibly suppress the calls for internal reform in the Arab world over decades. The main obstacle hindering reform is the lack of the necessary political will on the part of the most of the Arab governments.
- 2- Readiness for constructive interaction with the initiative of the G8, the "Forum for the Future" and the representatives of Arab governments participating in this Forum. They previously cooperated with the similar regional and international initiatives. This is due to their commitment to work through the mechanisms available to contribute to a real reform in each state. This is based on an independent status and within an agenda and a strategy partly concluded by the civil society over the past years through declarations and programs of action.
- 3- The Palestinian and Iraqi issues can not be invoked as pretexts not to start reforms. However, the continuation of the Israeli occupation with its crimes against the Pal-

estinian people and its properties, double standards towards its rights and postponing the full hand over of sovereignty to the Iraqi people negatively affect the dynamics of the process of reform.

- 4- The G8 governments are urged to revoke the double standards policy towards the issues of the Arab world, violations of human rights and democracy in each state and take individual and collective stances towards it. In addition to monitoring public elections and opinion trials, rendering the relations of political and economic reform pending on proceeding in reform and the abidance of each state by its commitments.
- 5- Activating the role of the Forum for the Future and that of the civil society are intertwined. The civil society should be considered an equal partner in all phases of preparation for the meetings of the civil society. The requirements for a deep discussion of the visions and proposals of the civil society should be provided. The Arab governments should not practice security harassment of the civil society NGOs and delegations participating in the Forum and all international for a.
- 6- Deeming the civil society as an equal partner should not be restricted to the occasion of the Forum, it should be a daily reality. Arab governments in each state should manage an

equal and effective dialogue with the civil society on the means to implement the plans and timetables for reform. Such dialogues should not require a mediator from the G8 in order to take place. The heads of the G8, when visiting the Arab states should be keen on holding meetings with the civil society actors and NGOs in such countries.

- 7- The real examination of the intentions of the Arab governments towards reform is that such governments declare their commitment to immediate revision of the laws governing the establishment of NGOs and amending them as per the international criteria, cease conscience trials and releasing advocates of reform.

In this context, the conference highlighted a number of priorities helping the development of the forces of reform:

- Launching the freedom of possessing mass media and the flow of information.
- Launching the freedom of establishing and running political parties, syndicates and NGOs.
- Launching freedoms of expression, particularly the right to assembly and meeting.
- Ending the state of emergency – wherever applied – and repealing the laws and exceptional courts.
- Ensuring the rights of women and ending

all forms of inequality and discrimination against women in the Arab states.

- Immediate release of the advocates of reform, human rights defenders and prisoners of conscience.
- Adhering to the rules of transparency and accountability and combating corruption.

- Confirming the relation between the economic reform and comprehensive political reform based on the respect of democracy and human rights.
- Devising policies and mechanisms providing effective insurance network for the vulnerable segments affected by structural reforms particularly women, the poor, children and the historically marginalized ethnic groups.
- Urging governments to revise the contents of religious discourse in the religious and secular curricula and feeding them with the renewing ideas. All religions and creeds should be equally treated in the media and educational curricula.

The conference pointed out that activating the role of the civil society with all its groups in the partnership with the states participating in the "Forum for the Future" necessitates developing institutions and mechanisms relevant to its organization. This requires the following:

- 1- Developing mechanisms for the participation

of the civil society in the "Forum" as per definite mechanisms including; increasing the number of its representatives and involving it in all phases of preparation of the agenda and the meeting and all issues relevant to political, economic, social and educational reform.

- 2- Adopting the structure to be established by the civil society to participate in the Forum for the Future so that it becomes a channel for a dynamic, institutional and stable follow up with the G8 and the governments of the region on the development of the issue of reform.
- 3- Establishing an index for democratic reform to measure the progress of the Arab states in the process of democratic reform, equal integration of women in the public life. It would issue an annual report to that effect. It works on monitoring and evaluating election processes in the Arab world as per the international standards.

Furthermore, the document adopted by the conference 27 programs of action for the civil society on the national, Arab regional and Euro-Mediterranean level to enhance reform.



Rabat Declaration

**Towards an Equal Partnership for Democracy,
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and Social Development**

**Statement of Civil Society NGOs and Actors to the
"Forum for the Future" ***

1- Upon an initiative by the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), the Moroccan Organization for Human Rights (OMDH), the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN) actors and institutions of the civil society from 13 Arab states met on December 8 and 9, 2004 with the participation of 9 international organizations. The meeting is based on the pursuit of dialogue with all international, regional and national parties concerned, whether governmental or non-governmental. The said meeting aims at positive interaction with the G8 initiative on reforming the Arab region and submitting visions and recommendations of the first official meeting of the "Forum for the Future" held under the auspices of the Moroccan government. According to this initiative, the Forum represents a framework for dialogue between the Broader Middle East countries, the civil society and the business community. We



do not claim to represent our societies, only a free vote will do.

2- The civil society NGOs and actors firmly believe that the process of reform in the Arab world is an internal one to be undertaken by all national, governmental and non-governmental, actors aspiring for real and tangible reform that would meet the aspirations of the peoples towards progress, development, democracy, human rights, security and peace. However, they reject and denounce repression of the attempts for reform from within in the Arab world over past decades. Indeed, the main obstacle hindering reform in the Arab world is the lack of the required political will on the part of the majority of the governments.

3- The civil society institutions and actors sponsoring and participating in the Rabat conference have previously reiterated their stance on the international initiatives proposed over 2003 and 2004 on the issue of reform in the Arab world. They recommended a constructive interaction therewith (Second Independence – Beirut, March 19 – 22, 2004). After the G8 Summit in June 2004, the said institutions developed their stance as the G8 initiative adopted some of the most important demands of the peoples on reform over the last decades. Therefore, they deemed it a viable framework convenient for dialogue and interaction provided that the civil society is involved as an equal

partner (Priorities and Mechanisms of Reform in the Arab World, Cairo, July 5 – 7, 2004). Afterwards, the civil society actors presented their recommendations to the preparatory meeting of the Forum for the Future last September in New York.

Constructive engagement with the G8 initiative is based on our commitment to a human vision aiming at restoring our nations and region to the world arena and history. It is based on an independent stance and within the framework of a non-governmental agenda and a strategy all of us contributed to over the last years. This is embodied in the reference documents forming the grounds for launching this conference.

The civil society organizations and actors perceive the Forum for the Future as a project for a new international mechanism, inter alia, (United Nations Treaty-bodies and Committees, the Euro-Mediterranean mechanism launched by the Barcelona process and African mechanisms e.g. NIPAD and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights). All of which fall short than enforcing their declared principles. However, they provide a chance for the civil society organizations in the Arab world to propose their visions and recommendations on reform in their countries in the presence of representatives of the Arab governments.

Unfortunately, the Arab world, except for Morocco, did not witness such frameworks and mechanisms allowing direct interaction between the government and the representatives of the civil society. Most of the Arab states reject dialogue on equal footing with the civil society actors unless in an international or regional non-Arab forums!

The Arab Summit held in Tunisia in May 2004 adopted a charter for human rights that does not recognize the role of the NGOs. Moreover, the League of Arab States is not entitled to grant observer status for NGOs unless approved by their governments!

Therefore, the civil society actors and NGOs aspire for the nascent mechanism of the "Forum for the Future". They wonder whether it is going to be effective or a mere forum for public relations and redundant speech about the significance of reform and exchange of interests forsaking the issue of reform per se.

In this respect, the central question is the credibility of this new framework. What is the role of the civil society in the said forum? Would it be a guest of honor to be given the floor to deliver a statement and some recommendations to be added to the archive of the issues of reform pending a tangible action for decades in the Arab world? Or would it be an equal partner so that the Forum would be a channel for activating the process of reform and

turned into local for a inciting action in each country without waiting for the annual or bi-annual meetings?

The representatives of the civil society presented a number of recommendations to the preliminary meeting of the Forum for the Future last September in New York. What became of such recommendations? Were they discussed? What was the stance on them? Did the governments respond to such recommendations? Were some of them adopted? Or were they "archived"? Up to the moment the civil society did not receive any response!

4- 2004 witnessed an overwhelming official rhetorical discourse concerned with reform. The Arab governments organized conferences on reform! Some were held in the name of the civil society e.g. the Sana'a and Alexandria meetings, as if this spares them the responsibility of reform!

However, 2004 did not witness a single serious move towards reform. Morocco was the exception as it witnessed a new qualitative initiative for reform from within which started few years ago by the establishment of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission. The profile of the situation in the Arab world is as follows:

- Setback of the efforts for reform (Bahrain).
- Outbreak of a new civil war (Darfur in Su-

dan).

- Rejection declared to take any step towards political reform (ruling party in Egypt). In the meantime, the security authorities expand administrative detention and the practice of torture.
- Administrative harassment of the civil society organizations, detention and farcical trials of the human rights defenders (Bahrain, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Egypt and Sudan).
- Farcical elections one of a kind all over the world whose results are known beforehand (e.g. Tunisia). Moreover, arbitrarily amending the constitution in Lebanon authorizing the extension of the term of the president, in response to Syrian pressures, in spite of the objections of the local and international public opinion.
- Likewise, the silence or the collaboration of the majority of the Arab governments with a religious discourse and fatwa justifying terrorism issued by jurists some of them working for religious institutions subject to the state. They use media outlets owned by the state or monarchical families. Hence, the assassination of the human rights defender, Farag Fouda, in Egypt in 1992 was not the beginning of the series of victims; neither will be the murder of Margaret Hassan, the symbol

of humanitarian work in Iraq the end of it. Many years ago, the human rights institutions declared that the responsibility of terrorism in the Arab world is not restricted to those who shot bullets; it rather includes those who provide fatwa justifying such actions and rendering them religiously legitimate.

- The issue of women in the Arab world, though discrimination continued against it generally, witnessed a tangible improvement in some countries and competitiveness among the Arab governments in this respect. This is maintained as long as it improves situations within relations with the international community and does not affect the monopoly of political power.

5- The chronic and new armed conflicts in the Arab world had negative consequences on the dynamics of reform. In Iraq, in spite of the handing over of power to an interim government, the multinational forces continued unheeding the civilians and the commitments of the International Humanitarian Law and the Human Rights Law, particularly in Falluja and Abu Ghraib jail. On the other hand, the terrorist groups in Iraq bombarded civil institutions, abducted and murdered police officers as well as Iraqi and non-Iraqi civilians. The latest initiative of Sharm El-Sheikh conference might

be a way out of the current plight, provided that the intentions of the parties concerned are honest.

In the Palestinian territories, there are systematic atrocities by the Israeli occupation forces as war crimes. Moreover, the de facto settlements and the apartheid wall undermine the establishment of a Palestinian state in the future. However, some of the G8 countries deal with Israel as being above the law and international legitimacy. It was not held accountable for not implementing the resolutions of the international community over half a century that latest of which was the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the wall.

In Darfur, the Sudanese government equipped itself with armed militias, attacked several areas and villages, provided air-defense for militias and directly shelled the Sudanese citizens. Accordingly, dozens were killed and 1,2 million turned into IDPs or refugees inside and outside the country in addition to the outbreak of famine, epidemics and massive rape of women.

6- In its relation with the Arab world over 2004, the international community scored some positive and negative points. The international community granted the issues of reform in the Arab world a vital moral support. This was through the G8 initiative, the Security Council resolutions on Darfur, the South of Sudan and

the Syrian intervention in the internal affairs of Lebanon and lastly in the statement of Sharm El-Sheikh on Iraq. However, it completely failed regarding the Palestinian issue. Moreover, the situation in Darfur deteriorated lately - foretelling a new crisis.

Whoever lives in this area of the world would believe that the negative aspects of the action of the international community may completely remove the positive aspects. This illustrates the negative stance adopted by some civil society actors in the Arab world on an international initiative for reform and the spread of a public opinion completely skeptic as to the drives and seriousness of the G8 initiative.

The civil society actors and organizations participating in the Rabat conference have expressed on several occasions, collectively and severally, their belief that the process of reform in the Arab world should not wait for the settlement of the Palestinian issue. However, they are totally aware of the grave negative implications of not achieving any progress in the issue on the dynamics of the participation of cultural and political elites in the process of reform and direct backing of the anti-reform powers inside and outside the circles of governments.

The suspicions of the Arab peoples do not only stem from the double-standard approach to the rights of the Palestinian people, but also from the defaming silence for the voice of re-

form in some of the G8 states when bilateral or multilateral interests rise e.g. (Libya, Tunisia and Algeria). This is reminiscent of the historical support by a number of the G8 states to the despotic regimes in the Arab world for decades.

7- The Most Important Demands for Reform in the Arab World

The civil society organizations and actors participating in the conference call upon the Arab governments to adopt and implement the present demands. The latter were presented over decades by political parties, syndicates, NGOs and intellectuals. Most of such demands do not necessitate additional expenses; they rather provide resources being squandered by policies and practices leading to the deterioration of the region in all fields, as illustrated by the Arab Human Development Report in the Arab world.

a- Political and Religious Reform

- 1- Putting an end to the state of emergency.
 - 2- Respecting the principles of plural democracy and the right to peaceful rotation of power.
 - 3- Ending the enforcement of exceptional laws, the practice of arbitrary execution and the capital punishment.
 - 4- Guaranteeing independence of the civil judiciary, abolishing exceptional courts, end-
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ing referral of civilians to martial courts regardless of their charges and ensuring the enforcement of the principle of the rule of law. .

- 5- Ending administrative and preventive detention and releasing all prisoners of conscience and those detained without charge or trial. Refraining from pursuing opinion opponents and criminalizing them and allowing the exiled for political reasons to return to their countries without conditions and with legal guarantees.
- 6- Putting a final end to the practice of torture, being a crime against humanity, and pursuing its perpetrators and bringing them to justice and blocking illegal prisons.
- 7- Adopting the Moroccan experience of the Equity and Reconciliation Committee and calling upon the Arab governments to benefit from such experience in doing justice to the victims of human rights violations.
- 8- Reforming Arab legislations according to international standards, particularly those contradicting the freedom of opinion and expression, the circulation of information and the right to knowledge. Working on ending the state authority over the mass media. Calling upon the Arab governments to codify the right to peaceful assembly and party for all the political and intellectual groups in the framework of democratic laws and con-

stitutions.

- 9- Prohibiting religious institutions from practicing any form of censorship on the political, intellectual, literary and artistic activities
- 10- Taking prompt measures towards administrative and financial reform, combating corruption and abuse of public property and enhancing mechanisms of transparency and accountability.
- 11- Protecting human rights defenders and their rights to receive information, hold meetings, contact all the concerned sides, and make use of local and international laws to defend human rights. Guaranteeing their right to receive local and international funds to fulfill their missions by virtue of the Universal Declaration of the Protection of Human Rights Defenders. Urging the Arab governments having reservations to the Declaration to end them. Calling upon the Arab ministers of Interior to reconsider their decision deeming human rights NGOs as threat to the national security.
- 12- Recognizing linguistic, cultural, ethnic, religious and other plurality and the respect for human rights of minorities on top of which full equality and enjoying the right of a full citizenship.
- 13- Urging the governments to review and develop the contents of religious discourse

within religious or non-religious educational curriculums and to reinvigorate the curriculum with the ideas of religious innovators. Equality between all religions and schools in the means of mass media and educational curricula should be ensured.

b- Women's Rights:

1. Providing women with equal opportunities in political participation through education and political and economic support. Women should be allocated posts in decision-making institutions to guarantee their full and effective participation. Allocating a quota for women in parliaments, representative institutions and public bodies as a temporary measure. This should stand until appropriate frameworks for women's voluntary activity take shape and until the awareness of the necessity of equality increases and all forms of discrimination are eliminated.
2. Repealing the discriminatory references in national legislation and promulgating and amending laws on family based on gender equality.
3. Ensuring the right of women to grant their nationality to their children from foreign husbands, as men exercise such rights.
4. Combating all forms of discrimination against women particularly the unspoken ones e.g. family violence, sexual exploita-



tion in prostitution, honor crimes, etc. The governments should assume their responsibility regarding these issues through developing the legal mechanisms and necessary services to provide protection and treatment for the victims of violence.

5. Engaging women's and human rights NGOs in the process of reviewing current legislation and in upgrading civil and criminal laws, with a view to resolutely confront all forms of violence and discrimination against women.
6. Calling upon Arab governments that did not ratify the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against women (CEDAW) to ratify the convention with no reservations and calling upon ratifying states to lift their reservations. Amending their institutional, legislative and constitutional systems to be consistent with the CEDAW and should establish mechanisms of implementation and monitoring of the modified systems.

c- The Rights of Migrant workers and Refugees

- 1- The necessity of respecting basic human rights of all categories of migrants in receiving states, including those compulsory residing therein in an illegal way. Domestic laws should be reviewed and rendered con-
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sistent with international standards. States are called upon in particular to ratify the International Convention on the Protection of Migrant Workers and Members of their Families of 1990.

- 2- The League of Arab States should draft an Arab Agreement on the Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers and Members of their Families and should also call upon Arab governments to conduct bilateral and multilateral agreements between exporting and receiving states of workers to safeguard the protection of migrant workers and criminalize the phenomenon of mass expulsion.
- 3- Annulling the sponsorship system, Al Kafil enforced in the Gulf States.
- 4- Protecting foreign female migrant workers against sexual exploitation and slavery and safeguarding their social and economic rights.
- 5- Safeguarding the rights of refugees and asylum seekers and ensuring their access to civil, economic, social and cultural rights. It urges the Arab states to sign and ratify the Geneva Convention of 1951 on Refugees and the Complementary Protocol of 1967.

d- Development and Economic Reform

- 1- Confirming the relatedness of economic reform and the comprehensive political reform based on the respect of democracy and hu-
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man rights.

- 2- Managing broad national dialogues on the options and priorities of economic reform and opening democratic channels for enhancing the participation of citizens in the processes of making economic decision.
- 3- Enhancing transparency and accountability and ensuring the flow of information on the economic situation to the public opinion.
- 4- Urging states to take due account of human rights' obligations when negotiating, concluding and implementing commercial and economic and financial agreements.
- 5- Devising policies and mechanisms guaranteeing effective safety networks for the weak and vulnerable groups affected by processes of structural reform particularly women, the poor, children and the historically marginalized ethnic groups.
- 6- Guaranteeing the freedom of economic experts and Arab expert houses in criticizing and evaluating the various regional and international economic agreements to which the Arab states are parties. Similarly, the Arab economic policies and procedures.

e- The Palestinian Issue

An immediate action is imperative to end the Israeli occupation and empower the Palestinian people to enjoy their right to self-determination and establishing its state in Gaza

and the West Bank including Hebron. The international legitimacy resolutions on the Palestinian refugees should be implemented. Until then protection of the Palestinian civilians should be ensured as per the Fourth Geneva Convention. Moreover, the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the apartheid barrier should be implemented. The conference condemns targeting and terrorizing civilians on both sides.

f- The Iraqi Issue

All parties are urged to respect Security Council Resolution No. 1546 and the recommendations of Sharm El-Sheikh statement and enforcing them, particularly giving the UN a leading role in the political process in Iraq, developing national dialogue and building consensus among the Iraqi people on drafting the permanent national constitution in 2005. The Iraqi interim government is urged to expand the scope of political participation through encouraging all elements rejecting violence to get involved in the political and election process through peaceful means. It should be underscore that Iraq is a sovereign state and politically independent and that the jurisdiction of the multinational troops in Iraq is defined as per the Security Council Resolution No. 1546. Such troops should abide by the International Law particularly the obligations set in the Inter-

national Humanitarian Law. Members of the former Iraqi regime who are accused of committing war crimes and crimes against humanity should be brought to a just trial as per the international standards.

Furthermore, the conference calls upon the High parties to the Four Geneva Conventions to hold perpetrators of the crimes violating International Humanitarian Law committed after the invasion accountable regardless of the identity of the perpetrators.

g- The Sudanese Issue

- 1- The coming constitution should be drafted through vast consultations conducted by a constitutional committee celebrating neutrality and balanced representation. Such would be in effect through establishing suitable channels enabling all social and political powers to convey their point of view to the committee. A national constitutional conference should be held and attended by representatives of political powers and civil society or delegates elected for such purpose. In addition, the Security Council is urged to consider the proposal of the major parties in Northern Sudan to sponsor such conference.
- 2- Any peace agreement without peaceful settlement of the current conflict in Darfur and the tension in the East of Sudan would merely be a temporary solution for the crisis of

the nation-state building in Sudan and the problems of stability, development and respect for human rights. The main lesson to be learnt from the long war in South Sudan, which is about to come to an end, is the impossibility of solving problems stemming from national injustices and the deterioration of development through war.

8- Priorities of Reform in the Arab World

Biding on self-development mechanisms and reform forces in every country necessarily requires the selection of specific priorities which might contribute to the development of the power of these forces and the creation of the best environment conducive to the most creative interactions between its different components, as well as between them, the ruling elite and international community. It will also eventually lead to a fundamental amendment of the dominant political formula.

In this respect, a number of shared priorities for reform that should aid in the empowerment of reform forces identified as follows:

1. Freedom of owning media instruments and of the flow of information.
2. Freedom of establishing and administering political parties, trade unions and NGOs.
3. Freedom of expression, in particular the rights to assembly and association.
4. Lifting of states of emergency, wherever it is

enforced, and the annulment exceptional laws and courts.

5. Ensuring the rights of women and ending all forms of inequality and discrimination against women in the Arab states.
6. Immediate release of the human rights defenders and advocates and prisoners of conscience.

On the regional level, impediments within the League of Arab States hindering participation with the civil society should be abolished. The real NGOs should undertake a monitoring role inside the League.

9- Towards improving the role of the Forum for the Future

On previous occasions and in published documents, the deliberations of the civil society actors and NGOs indicated that their stance on the international initiatives for reform including, inter alia, the G8 Plan and the Forum for the Future will be conditional on the following:

- 1- "To what extent do these initiatives consider the internal requirements of reforms within the Arab world, whose peoples and reformists have been paying high prices for reforms over more than a century through detention, exile, torture, murder, unfair trials, civil wars, mass massacres, poverty and terrorism?"
- 2- "This partnership should lead to the es-

establishment of institutions accountable before the peoples of the Arab world and the international community. Civil society organizations must have a central role in the drawing up of the priority reforms as well as in their implementation. They must also be involved in the process of monitoring the reforms and of identifying benchmarks for their evaluation."

Unfortunately, the 6-month experience with the G8 initiative with these institutions does not respond to such demands. However, it stirs pessimism regarding the potentiality of participating in launching a new process for reform and unless it heeds this immediately.

It was such a mistake on the part of the draftsmen of the G8 document to ignore reference to the initiatives of the civil society in the Arab world and referring only to the documents issued by conferences organized by some governments in the region. However, the mistake seems not to have been unintentional as the civil society is not being involved in the preparations for the meetings of the Forum for the Future. The documents and projects to be submitted to the meeting were not presented to the civil society. Even if the civil society presents its documents – as in the latest New York meeting – they are just being listened to and nothing is known of what became of such documents. Have they been discussed? Or was

it just a matter of listening? The preparations for the Rabat meeting do not foretell a different approach in dealing with the civil society. Consequently, serious inquiries arise among the circles of the civil society regarding the added value of the direct participation in the proceedings of the Forum for the Future. Why not then restricting such participation to mailing the recommendations of the civil society for saving efforts and money and avoiding delusion of the public opinion that the civil society is a real partner in the Forum.

Activating the role of the Forum for the Future and that of the civil society in the Forum are inter-related missions necessitating the following:

- 1- The civil society should be deemed an equal partner in all phases of the preparations for the meetings of the Forum and during its meetings. Hence, providing the necessary requirements of a thorough discussion of the visions, proposals and recommendation of the civil society.
- 2- The Arab governments should stop harassing the civil society institutions and delegations participating in the Forum. The real examination of the honesty of the intensions of the Arab governments towards reform is to declare, here from Rabat, their commitment to immediately revise the laws governing the establishment and activities of the civil so-

ciety institutions, amending them in the light of the international standards. Moreover, they are urged to cease opinion trials and release reformists.

- 3- All parties of the Forum for the Future should be keen not to gradually turn the Forum into a club for discussions on the significance and urgency of reform in the Arab world, as an alternative to starting reform. The Forum should be a platform for providing time-tabled plans for tangible reforms, evaluation and exchange of experiences on such reform.
- 4- The governments of the G8 should adopt one standard towards the issues of the Arab world including the Palestinian issue and violations of human rights and democracy in each state. They should adopt declared collective and individual stances including participation in monitoring the opinion trials and public elections. Political and economic cooperation should be conditioned on progress in reform and the fulfillment of the commitments of the states. They should abstain from providing security support to the repression of human rights.
- 5- Deeming the civil society as an equal partner should not be restricted to the occasion of the Forum, it should be a daily reality.
 - a- The Arab governments in each state should manage a serious and equal di-



dialogue with the civil society on the means to implement the plans of reform and the appropriate timetables. Such dialogue should not be pending the participation of a G8 mediator in order to take place.

- b- The presidents and delegations of the G8, when visiting the Arab states, should meet with the civil society organizations and actors in such countries as is the case when Arab kings and presidents are visiting some of the G8 countries.

10- Programs and Mechanisms of the Process of Reform

The initiative of the G8 did not stir the civil society to tackle the issue of reform. The civil society actors and NGOs undertake their role with respect to the issue of reform long ago. However, their efforts failed, either due to the lack of cooperation or resistance by the Arab governments, or the collaboration of the international community in backing despotic regimes in the region for decades ago or for both reason.

Some programs are currently being implemented and others pending consideration.

a- Programs being implemented by civil society organizations on the national, Arab regional or Euro-Mediterranean level

- 1- Holding civil meetings parallel to the
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Summit meetings of Arab kings and presidents, presenting the recommendations of the civil society to such meetings and seeking to represent the civil society as an observer party.

- 2- Establishing a coordinating structure encompassing the human rights NGOs on the issue of reform in the Arab world. Among the mechanisms of such structure is working parallel to the League of Arab States and submitting their recommendations to the relevant meetings of its agencies and committees.
- 3- Structuring the Euro-Mediterranean Civil Forum encompassing civil society NGOs Southern and Northern Mediterranean. It would parallel the meetings of the Foreign Ministers of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and present the recommendations of the civil society to them.
- 4- Establishing a funding institution with high flexibility for supporting human rights activities in states of emergency.
- 5- Managing deep dialogues among religious reformists in Asia and the Arab world to benefit from the lessons and experiences learned from Asian Islam regarding renewing religious discourse.
- 6- Enhancing integration among women's rights and human rights NGOs within a joint framework aiming at integrating

women's rights in human rights.

- 7- Enhancing the role of national human rights institutions, adjusting them as per the international standards and introducing the experience of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission in Morocco to the public opinion in the Arab world aiming at adopting it in other countries.
- 8- Proceeding with the issue of constitutional reform into practice by proposing a minimum of standards and drafting alternative constitution bills.
- 9- Forming coalition bodies encompassing political parties and civil society institutions for joint work on the issue of reform.
- 10- Conducting educational and training activities for various segments in order to disseminate the principles of democracy, development and human rights and enhance the potentials of the civil society in this regard as well as that of election monitoring.
- 11- Conducting media and campaigning activities directed to various segments of the public using publications, the media, arts, symposia and conferences for spreading awareness of the issues of democracy, human rights and political, cultural, economic and social reform.
- 12- Holding regional and national de-

liberations for debate and exchange of experience on the issues of democratization, the respect of human rights, combat of corruption and reform of religious discourse.

- 13- Conducting theoretical and applied studies and research on the problematic issue of the respect of human rights in the Arab world.
- 14- Monitoring, analyzing and documenting violations of human rights and informing the national and international public opinion of them.
- 15- Managing dialogues with the most prominent political parties – including Islamic politicians – on the issues of developing the rights and democratic content in the ideologies of such currents.

b- Programs under consideration by the civil society organizations:

- 1- Devising a stable structure for the civil society coping with the meetings of the G8 and the Forum for the Future in order to have a dynamic follow up for the issue of reform on the agendas of such meetings. Benefiting from the experience of the Euro-Mediterranean Civil Forum.
- 2- Developing a scientific and practical index for measuring the progress of the Arab states in the process of reform and issuing an annual report thereon.

- 3- Establishing a forum for democratic reform encompassing civil society actors, the business community and reformist elements in the ruling elites. It aims at entrenching dialogue on reform in each country and the Arab world with the participation of experts from countries having similar experiences e.g. Eastern and Middle Europe and Latin America.
- 4- Establishing a special fund for supporting the prisoners of conscience in the Arab world.
- 5- Establishing a watchdog for monitoring adherence of elections in the Arab world to the international criteria. Participating in field monitoring and training local monitors for this purpose.
- 6- Providing potentials for keeping judges, lawyers and law professors in the Arab world closely informed of the developments in the scholarship of the International Human Rights Law and its implementations, particularly in the European Court for Human Rights.
- 7- Managing dialogues among political actors and intellectuals and actors in the Arab world on the sensitive problematiques relevant to the issue of reform e.g. the relation between the state and religion with the participation of representatives of all relevant currents and

schools.

- 8- Re-publishing the historical and new reformist religious publications and widely distributing them.
- 9- Launching a reform-specific website on the internet.
- 10- Organizing special training courses for the Arab human rights NGOs on the utilization of the UN mechanisms and presenting reports to it. In addition to providing the potentiality of regular attendance of the meetings of the agencies concerned or establishing a special training center for such a purpose.
- 11- Producing documentary films concerned with reform with a view to launching a TV channel for this purpose in the Arab world.
- 12- Enhancing the production of educational and artistic material on human rights and democracy.

Endnote

* The present declaration is based on the deliberations of the conference parallel to the first meeting of the Forum for the Future held in Rabat, December 8 – 9, 2004 and the accumulative work of the civil society NGOs throughout a decade, particularly the following documents:

- Casablanca Declaration, issued by the First International Conference of the Human Rights Movement in the Arab world, April 1999.
- A memorandum presented by 36 human rights organization to the League of Arab States in December 2003 on the revision of the Arab Charter of Human Rights.
- The recommendations "The Second Independence" of The First Arab civil Forum, parallel to the Arab Summit, held in Beirut March 2004 and organized by the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), in cooperation with the Association for Defending Rights and Freedoms in Lebanon (ADL) and the Palestinian Human Rights Organization, and in coordination with the Euro Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN) and the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH), and gathered 52 NGOs from 13 Arab Countries. These recommendations were submitted to the Kings and Presidents of the Arab League States before their summit asking to allow the civil society to attend their meeting as observers, but there was no response.
- A statement by 34 NGOS on the outcomes of the Arab summit released in 26th of May 2004.
- The final report of the regional conference on "Priorities and Mechanisms of Reform" held in Cairo July 2004, organized by the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR) and Al Siyassa Al Dawlia magazine with participants from 15 Arab countries.
- The position paper by the EMHRN, FIDH, CIHRS on international initiatives for reform in the Arab Region, issued on the occasion of US-EU summit on June 23rd, 2004
- A joint memorandum by 31 Arab Human Rights NGOs calling for Protection of civilians and trial of perpetrators of human rights violations in Darfur, released on September 16th, 2004.
- The statements of the Forum for Democratic Reform in the Arab Region on Darfur and Tunisia and the Prisoners of Conscience in the Arab world.

Extracts from: Position of the EMHRN, the FIDH and the CIHRS on "International Initiatives for Reforms in the Arab Region"