23 Human Rights organizations call for empowering MENA diaspora activists, placing them at the heart of the discourse for change

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Twenty-three human rights organizations, including Euro-Med Monitor, HuMena, and Innovation for Change (I4C)-MENA Hub, published a petition that calls for sparking the untapped potentials of MENA diaspora activists; by empowering and placing them at the heart of the discourse for change, rather than leaving them marginalized.

Ten years after the eruption of the Arab Spring, huge masses of civilians found themselves forced to immigrate from their home countries towards Europe, the USA, and Canada, escaping the lack of freedom and grave human rights violations. However, even after reaching safe destinations, some civil activists and human rights defenders have fallen victim to depression and political frustration due to the negligence of their host-governments and depriving them from their rights of social and political engagement.

“Diaspora activists are the backbone of positive change towards development and democratization in their home countries, as they enjoy a greater margin abroad to organize and express themselves freely unconstrained by the repression of Arab regimes” said Ahmed AlNaouq, Lobbying Manager at Euro-Med Monitor, “Enabling and empowering them, placing them at the heart of the discourse, would unleash a powerful untapped resource for sustainable improvement.”

“MENA diaspora activists and organizations are a powerful engine of change and of promotion of a new social contract because they have a wider margin to exercise their freedom of speech, and enjoy a more stable access to the international community. As such, their dissent abroad has the capacity to champion human rights advocacy” said Sarah Sheikh Ali, HuMena director, “In order to achieve political change in the MENA region and to promote democracy and stability, MENA diaspora activists and CSOs should be placed at the heart of policy making and political change, not marginalized from it.”

In November 2020, the HuMena for Human Rights Organization published a study entitled, “Diaspora Engagement: The Change Mantra” which concludes that Arab diaspora activists in exile are facing obstacles that hinder their full participation due to the lack of communications between diaspora CSOs and activists, the difficulty to reach decision makers, the need of activists for advanced knowledge and skills, and the inability to access adequate funds.

The study suggests that involving diaspora activists in reshaping the future of the MENA region requires co-creation of transnational advocacy and mobilization networks that push toward new

policymaking processes on international levels, and influence power relations, in order to promote and protect human rights in the region. The report revealed that the lack of psychological support to MENA activists has led to losing many lives, as tens of MENA diaspora activists are committing suicide every year in EU countries, Canada, and the USA.

The petition emphasized that promoting democracy, stability and political change in the Middle East requires prioritizing activities of dissent and political immigrants. Activists and CSOs should be equipped with the needed tools for empowering them socially and politically in their new homes.

The signatories of the petition call on the UN, EU commission, and host-governments, in particular EU States, Canada, and the USA, to better engage the MENA diaspora's activists and CSOs**;** provide them with the appropriate psychological support prior engaging them politically and socially; involve them in strategic planning and decision-making process; and commit to international obligations and agreements to engage MENA diaspora youth groups in peace and conflict prevention efforts.

The petition also calls on the relevant bodies and institutions to **build the capacities of MENA diaspora's activists and CSOs;** train newly emerged activists on international and regional human rights systems and mechanisms; adapt the capacity-building approach, by working on up-scaling skills and knowledge of MENA diaspora activists and CSOs; and engaging MENA diaspora artists and media professionals.

The petition calls on host-governments to protect the rights of immigrants and refugees and respect the right of protection from refoulement. Governments are also in charge of criminalizing acts of xenophobia, racism, and sexism, or any other form of discrimination, with special attention to the most vulnerable groups like ethnic and religious minorities, and women.

Signatories:

- HUMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement
- The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor
- MENA Rights Group
- Innovation for Change – MENA Hub
- Geneva Council for Rights and Liberties
- The Francophone Association for Human Rights
- Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR)
- Amnesty – France
- The Day After
- Human Rights League (LDH) – France
- SAM Organizations for Rights and Liberties – Yemen
- Intersection Association for Rights and Freedoms – Tunisia

- The Freedom Initiative
- Initiative Franco-égyptienne pour les Droits et les Libertés
- ANKH (Arab Network for Knowledge about Human rights)
- Stichting Mission Lanka – Netherlands
- AWTAD Anti-Corruption Organization – Yemen
- Sky Line International
- Jeunes ambassadeurs d'Afrique – DRC
- Association for Promotion Sustainable Development – India
- Youth Foundation of Bangladesh
- KENYA ENVIRONMENT AND WASTE MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION
- RIHRDO (Rural Infrastructure and Human Resource Development Organization) – Pakistan

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