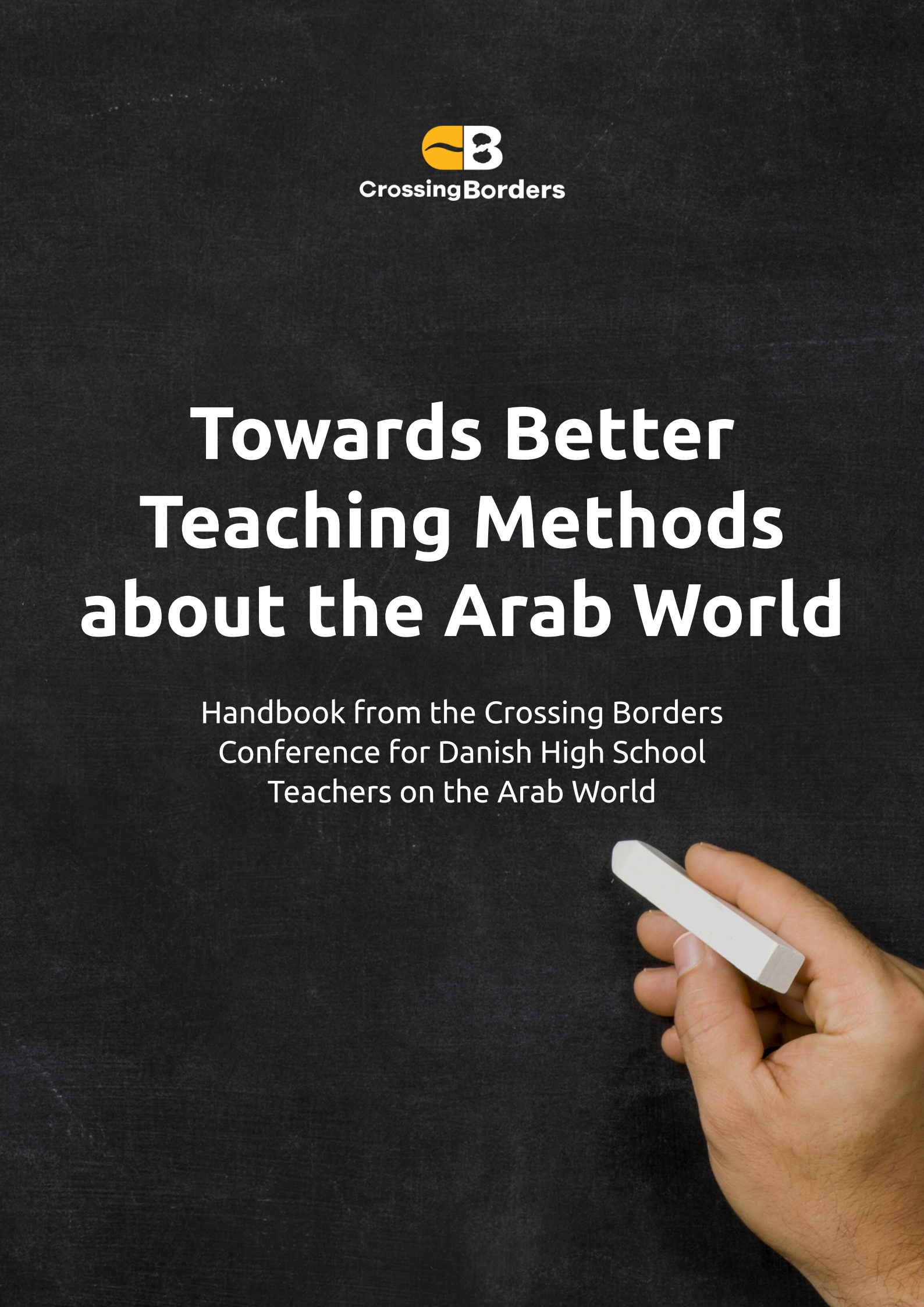
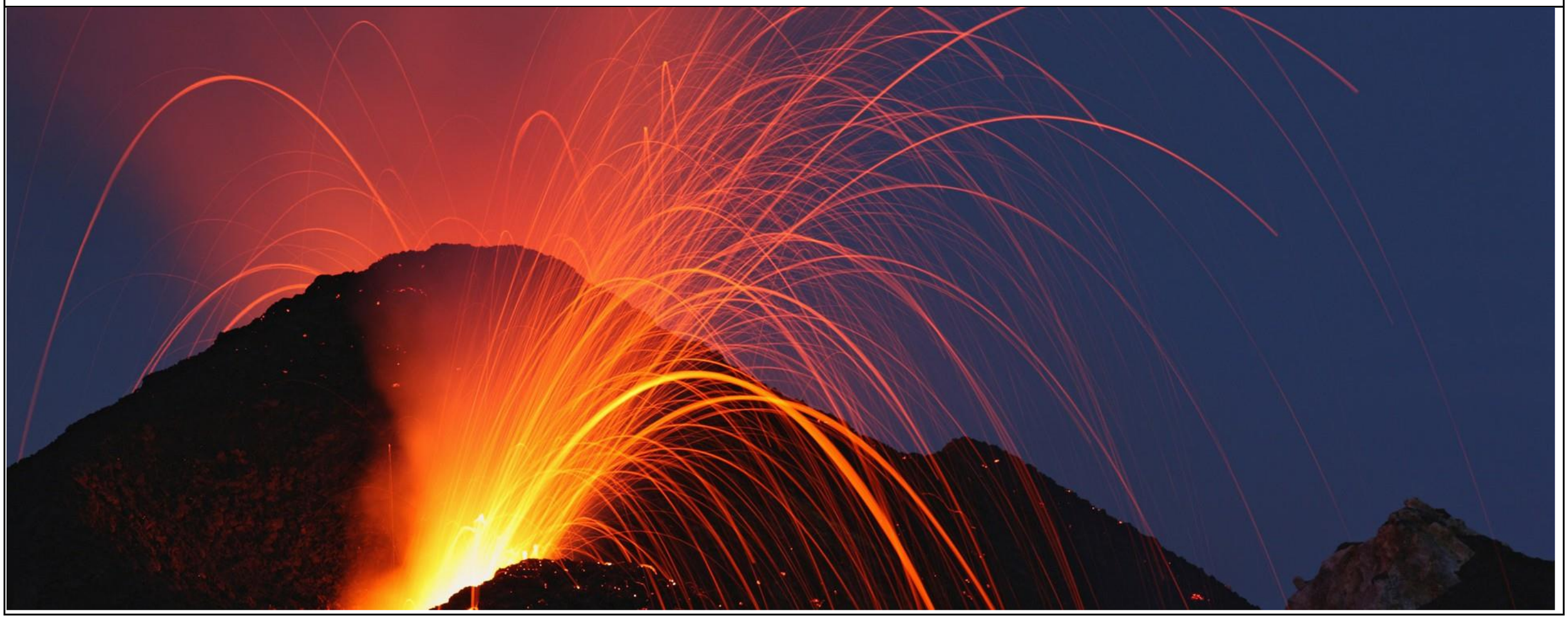
CrossingBorders

Towards Better Teaching Methods about the Arab World

Handbook from the Crossing Borders Conference for Danish High School Teachers on the Arab World



Towards Better Teaching Methods About the Arab Spring



This handbook is the result of Crosssing Borders' conference "Towards better teaching methods about the Arab world", which was held in collaboration with Global School Partnerships in Copenhagen on March 14, 2013.

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Purpose of the conference

The conference aimed to better equip educators – primarily secondary school teachers – to teach about the situation in the MENA area (Middle East and North Africa) in light of the changes in the region in recent years.

The uprisings in the Arab world have meant upheavals in the West's way of understanding and interpreting the Arab world and have thus challenged the possibilities of teaching about the region in a way, that does justice to the culture and the people.

The participants at the conference had the opportunity to meet speakers who are part of history being written right now. In addition to gaining insight into their interpretations and insight into what is happening in their countries and the region as a whole, the participants also got the speakers' suggestions on how this knowledge can be used in the teaching of Danish students in such a way that stereotypes are avoided and a multidimensional understanding is opening up.

The presentations at the conference were as follows:

- Oliver McTernan: "With What Gaze Should the 'New' Arab World Be Viewed?"
- Amal Al-Basha: "Women's Rights in Yemen".
- Dalia Zakhary: "Religion and Minorities in Egypt".
- Karim Mejri: "Freedom and Democracy in Tunisia".
- Hanna Ziadeh: "The Connection Between Human Rights and Islam in the Arab World".
- Mu'ayyad Mehyar: "The Role of Human Rights Institutions in the Aftermath of the Arab Spring".

Aim and content of the handbook

The aim of this handbook is to provide teachers with concrete presentations for teaching on current topics related to the Arab world.

The following teaching presentations were produced by the teachers during the conference's workshops:

- Women's rights in Yemen.
- Religion and minorities in Egypt.
- Freedom and democracy in Tunisia.
- Human rights in Islam.
- The role and mandate of human rights.

In addition to the teaching presentations, the handbook consists of presentations presented by the speakers at the conference, videos of the speeches, minutes and a fact sheet about the Arab countries that have experienced/are experiencing uprisings as well as links to current documents and videos about the uprisings.

We hope that this handbook can contribute to better knowledge, networks and education about the Arab world and understanding of the backgrounds, effects and future perspectives of the uprisings.

Videoer fra konferencen

Kort over den Arabiske Verden

Crossing Borders, June 2013.

PRESENTERS

Amal Al-Basha, Yemen

Amal Al-Basha is one of the most prominent human rights and women's rights advocates in Yemen - a country which normally don't allow women much freedom. With her back ground in International Development Studies and Gender from Sussex University in England she has managed to work her way into the political arena in Yemen and has become an influential woman. Basha is the cofounder of the Yemen National Institute for Human Rights and has a past as Program Manager at UNDP. Besides being the chairwoman at Sisters Arab Forum for Human Rights she is also the spokeswoman for the National Dialogue in Yemen which is the agency that is to ensure the democratic development of Yemen.

Oliver McTarnen, Irland

Forward Thinking and Nyon Process Projects

Oliver McTernan is the director and co-founder of Forward Thinking, a UK-based organisation, that works with national and global conflict resolution through inclusive dialogue. Prior to his current position, McTernan served as a Senior Advisor at the Club de Madrid, a group of former heads of state and government working to support governments engaged in a move towards democracy.

The Middle East Initiative

The Nyon Process

Tunisian Political Pluralism Dialogue Process

Egyptian Political Economic Dialogue Process

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The Middle East Initiative

Forward Thinking's Middle East Initiative is built upon the belief that a durable peace agreement to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can only be achieved through the active participation of those who are regarded as political or religious hardliners. The prime focus of our work in the Middle East is to promote a more inclusive peace process through dialogue with key Israeli and Palestinian stakeholders and political/religious leaders who previously had been unengaged.

The key aims of the Middle East Initiative are: To identify the issues preventing a solution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict at a regional and international level; To consolidate our relationships with hard-line Israeli and Palestinian groups and political leaders; To develop a broader network of contacts within the region among key political and faith-based leaders; To brief governments and other interested parties on our activities and offer an inside analysis of recent events; And to provide safe spaces for dialogue away from the region. Frequent meetings in the region, as well as in London and Brussels to brief interested parties, allow these aims to be met.

As part of our Middle East Initiative, we have also hosted cross-party delegations of Knesset members in London and Brussels. Furthermore, August 2012 saw our first cross-party Knesset delegation to Belfast, where Members of the Knesset (MKs) met with Unionist figures who shared their unique and pivotal experience of the Northern Ireland Peace Process. The delegation's visit proved highly insightful and useful for the Knesset members, providing an in-depth and honest account of the Unionist experience of the Peace Process where the achievements, failures and mistakes were all put forward. Lessons learnt through this experience, which may be applicable to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, were also enforced and discussed throughout with

sensitivity to the vast difference in context. This delegation visit has identified the value behind exposing MKs to the Unionist experience of the Northern Ireland Peace Process, and so we now intend to embark upon a programme of further Knesset delegation visits to Belfast over the next 18 months. This is to form an essential part of our Middle East Initiative.

In addition, we also work alongside the Gaza-based House of Wisdom Institute for Conflict Resolution and Governance, an organisation set up by Forward Thinking with financial support from the Swiss Foreign Ministry. The House of Wisdom has been involved within Palestinian society and politics ever since its inception in 2008, and it serves as a place where peace activists, media-oriented figures, international visitors and policy-makers seek an in-depth insight into the Palestinian socio-political situation. Forward Thinking assists the House of Wisdom in its various aims: To create a platform for reconciliation by peaceful means between the various Palestinian political factions; to provide an independent forum for in-depth dialogue and discussion of internal Palestinian and peace-related issues; to promote the study of statecraft and democracy from a Palestinian perspective; to examine ways of bridging the gap in understanding between the Islamic and Western worlds; to encourage dialogue on how to resolve long-standing conflict issues with Israel; and to engage young Palestinians in advocating the Palestinian cause and in political and socio-economic dialogue.

We believe there can be no top down solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There is an urgent need to listen to and engage with those who are perceived as political or religious hardliners. An agreement capable of resolving and transforming the conflict fundamentally requires the active engagement of multiple levels of leadership on both sides and the full participation of all political and faith-based leaders at each stage of the process.

The Nyon Process

The Nyon Process, established in 2008, is a dynamic and expanding group of secular and religious political leaders who meet regularly in an effort to bridge the growing gap in understanding that exists between religious and secular worldviews. This gap in understanding often leads to misguided or ill-informed policy-making and potential conflict at a national or global level. In the context of the dramatic changes underway in the Arab world, the Nyon Process is a unique network and forum of exchange and discussion, having engaged in constructive dialogue with many of the leaders of religio-political movements from across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), who are now leading their countries as a result of democratic elections.

Many of the issues that feed the perceived divide between Muslim and western societies are in fact more indicative of religious-secular divides that are playing out within both western secular and Muslim societies in both political and cultural arenas. The resolution of some political conflicts that fuel Islamic-western polarization may prove impossible without a greater engagement of religious social and political movements by more secular political leaders and policy-makers.

The Nyon Process provides the unique opportunity for a tri-part dialogue between secular political thinking and activism, religio-political thinking and activism, and policy-makers from the

US, Europe, Middle East and North Africa. In this way, the Nyon Process convenes western secular policy-makers; influential Muslim social and political activists; leading secular political activists from the MENA region; and American evangelicals engaged in social and political activity. The aim is to promote, across these faultlines and between these diverse constituencies, a level of understanding, respect and trust that will lead to joint action in addressing some of the political and social challenges we face today. This dialogue, and the accompanying joint-action, materialise as an active rejection of the discourse of a clash of civilisations. The achievement is a meeting of minds where differences are acknowledged and commonalities identified.

Achievements:

The Nyon Process has met nine times since the inaugural meeting in Nyon, Switzerland in July 2008, having met in Lisbon (October 2008), in Madrid (March 2009), Istanbul (August 2009, March 2010), Doha (March 2011), Oslo (November 2011), Tunis (June 2012) and Cordoba (January 2013). These meetings were hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in each country and allowed for interaction with officials of the host government.

The culture of Nyon is one of free, open and frank discussion where issues can be explored deeply in order to facilitate understanding in such a way that participants can return to their own constituencies to share their insights. Nyon is also a network where relationships formed at meetings can be utilised outside, and between, meetings.

In the margins of the Sixth Nyon Process meeting in Doha (March 2011), held in the immediate aftermath of the revolutions that had overturned the governments of Ben Ali and Mubarak, one religio-political activist remarked about the potential of Nyon going forward, that 'the real challenge will be to get a US evangelical and a Salafist together.' This has been achieved. At the Tunis meeting, June 2012, the leaderships of Salafist parties from Egypt and Tunisia participated in the Nyon Process meeting along with fifty other participants including evangelical political activists from the US.

After the Arab Revolutions, MENA-based participants remarked on numerous occasions, that their societies would benefit from national pluralism dialogues. These dialogues would engage secular and religio-political activists, from across the dominant political and social faultlines, to deepen understanding and strengthen social cohesion. Following the Tunis meeting of 2012, the Nyon Process has established in Tunisia and Egypt such a dialogue (described in detail below). These dialogue processes are focused around bringing to the table the 'hardliners' in Tunisian and Egyptian society – those commonly referred to as 'ultra-secularists' and the diversity of Salafist groups - together with the broader political centre ground represented by the governing forces and those parties that see themselves as a loyal opposition. These dialogue processes have the potential to be useful in other transitioning societies in the MENA region, whilst being mindful of the different political, social and cultural contexts of each country.

The Nyon Process is also a dynamic network of political actors, policy-makers and analysts who exchange ideas and collaborate in various ways outside of the meetings. Nyon Process reports are circulated by Ministries of Foreign Affairs of countries actively

participating in the Process. Others, such as the US or Dutch governments, also receive reports and circulate these throughout their Ministries and to relevant government officials, such as the White House Foreign Affairs team, Policy Planning at the State Department, and relevant Embassy staff. The EU has utilised the network to magnify its public diplomacy, seeking advice on Egyptian media for articles. In 2010, in response to the results of the Swiss referendum imposing a ban on the building of Minarets, members of the process co-operated with the Swiss Foreign Ministry to help formulate a response aimed at defusing potential conflict over such a contentious issue, and avoiding a repeat of the response to the Danish cartoons of the prophet Mohammad, printed in 2005.

The Nyon Process is currently in the process of collaborating on a conference to be held in early 2013 with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), convening governmental representatives from Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia with EBRD specialists to discuss ways in which a regional focused economic plan could be developed and how immediate practical steps aimed at providing jobs and local stability could be identified.

The Nyon Process has contributed to the establishment of the Berlin Process, a dialogue process that brings together Parliamentarians from Britain, France and Germany with their counterparts from the different Muslim Brotherhood parties in Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia.

The Nyon Process continues to collaborate with a number of other think tanks and institutes, for example with the Brookings Doha Centre and the UN Alliance of Civilisations (UNAOC) in December 2011, and also the EU Institute for Strategic Studies in April 2012.

Tunisian Political Pluralism Dialogue Process

The project formally began on 1st October 2012, and is funded by the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the European Union. The aim of the project is to engage senior political and civil society actors to work together at a national level for the common good of Tunisia. To achieve this, a step-by-step process of engagement to dialogue was planned by Forward Thinking to include: some eighteen workshops, two conferences (one midway through the process, one at the end) and three series of bilateral meetings. These activities allow Forward Thinking to: identify and engage with significant political actors, secular and religious; assess their aspirations and motivations; establish with them a relationship built on trust; and provide appropriate external assistance to facilitate a programme of internal dialogue. Ultimately, the Dialogue Process aims to support the stabilisation of the political situation in the country in terms of political parties finding sufficient consensus on key issues that enables the country to function effectively.

To date, as part of this project (excluding the exploratory dialogues and meetings Forward Thinking undertook between January – October 2012 in order to plan the project) Forward Thinking have held:

- Bilateral meetings with the various participants to the process 11-13 November 2012.

• Workshops with cross party and civil society participation 8th December 2012.

• Workshops with cross party and civil society participation 12th January 2013.

• Roundtable discussion with youth activists 23rd February 2013.

The agenda for the dialogue meetings is continually set by the participants. The visit in November 2012 was an opportunity to explore with the participants what issues the dialogue process should concentrate on. At the workshop on 8th December issues were presented to the whole group for them to agree the priorities for the agenda. It was recognised that the agenda is subject to change and the political climate in the country.

The process is not a dialogue for the sake of dialogue, but rather a process of building sufficient consensus to enable political stability that is also crucial for economic stability. It is essential in this process that we do not set the pace, but we give sufficient time to the diverse groups to form relationships and coalitions to help further their overall aims and goals of the process.

This is a process of dialogue to action to enable people to work together. What is required is a shift in mindsets that are currently preventing the level of cooperation that is essential for the country to move forward politically and economically. Providing a safe environment for dialogue, we are enabling the representatives of each of the parties and civil society organisations to understand and clarify the different perceptions they have of one another. There has been a notable shift in the prejudices over the last six months among the participants which had prevented them meeting prior to this initiative. The process is designed not to be just a series of meetings, but an inclusive journey that will contribute to the stability of the region and a peaceful transition.

The dialogue has already achieved some notable successes. The months of October, November, December and early January were distinguished by a stand-off between members of the Troika and Nidaa Tounis, with the parties of the Troika, including Ennahdha, refusing to meet with representatives of Nidaa Tounis. The December roundtable workshop inadvertently broke this stand-off when one of the participants, who was representing an NGO, stated her affiliation to Nidaa Tounis and that she would be representing them during the meeting. Far from the other parties leaving the table, a discussion ensued about the need to create a politically inclusive society. Feedback from participants after the meeting was very positive with regards to this development and approved that this space was an appropriate venue for such exchanges.

Egyptian Political Economic Dialogue Process

The Egyptian Political Economic Dialogue (EPED) process, supported by the Swiss Federal Department for Foreign Affairs (FDFA), began on 1st September 2012. The aim of the project is to engage senior economic political actors, along with those from civil society, business, the media and academia, to work together toward achieving a degree of consensus on the pressing economic challenges facing Egypt during this time of transition. To achieve this, a step-by-step process of engagement to dialogue was planned by Forward Thinking to include: some nine workshops, two conferences (one midway through the process, one at the end)

and six series of bilateral meetings. These activities will allow us to: identify and engage with significant political actors, secular and religious, as well as key figures from within civil society, the media, academia and the business community; assess their aspirations and motivations; establish with them a relationship built on trust; and provide appropriate external assistance to facilitate a programme of internal dialogue with the intention of achieving a degree of sufficient consensus on economic challenges.

Egypt's transition from an autocratic regime to an open durable democracy is threatened if the economic challenges facing the country are left unaddressed. For Egypt, and the country's new political leaders, the economic challenges are capable of destroying all that their revolution has accomplished and derailing the transition to stable democracy. In order to meet the economic challenges, there is an urgent need in the country to build institutions that are based on inclusiveness, equality and justice and that will guarantee the future of democracy within the country. The building of truly democratic institutions, underpinned by good governance, is the only guarantee for the future of democracy.

A process of inclusive dialogue, concentrating on overcoming the economic challenges Egypt faces, has the capacity to transcend the factional differences within the country to reach sufficient consensus on the economy. Such sufficient consensus achieved in this field could be catalytic in achieving sufficient consensus on other social and political differences that would enable the country to move forward.

There are deep divisions within Egyptian society that have the potential to damage the political process and the international perception of the country, and could indeed have a knock-on effect for investment and economic stability. Internal dialogue that focuses on the economic challenges, therefore, is of paramount importance if the political process is to continue in an inclusive, representative manner which addresses this divide.

To date, as part of this project (excluding the exploratory dialogue Forward Thinking undertook between January – September 2012 in order to plan the project) Forward Thinking have held:

- Bilateral meetings with the various participants, 28th – 31st October.

- Focus group meetings with the various participants of the process, 19th – 23rd November 2012.

- Workshops with political leaders from a wide range of parties and groups, 14th January 2013 and 27th February 2013.

- Workshops with economic advisors to Al Watan Party and the Freedom and Justice Party, along with senior figures from the media, academia and the business community, 15th January 2013 and 26th February 2013.

The agenda for the dialogue meetings is continually set by the participants.

Dalia Zakhary, Religion and minorities in Egypt

Look at the Arab spring away from any religious background

It is very important to look at the Arab spring as a movement towards freedom, dignity and justice, and not a religious movement. In order to get this point, we need to have a look at the Arab history in the last hundred years. In this period, no doubt that the levels of poverty, torture, corruption have increased while Human rights have decreased.

Moreover, it also necessary to look at the Arab nations away from their religions background, since not all Arabs are Muslim and not all Muslims are not Arab, nor does every followers of a given religion respond to the same stereotype.

This may become clearer when we compare between Muslims from China, Indonesia and Saudi Arabia on the one hand and on the other hand between the Christian from United States, South Africa and Egypt. My point is that the human being is made of a complex of identities.

It is necessary to understand the "why" and the "who" of the Arab spring.

The majority of the people who took part in the revolutionary belong to the new generation. They are in their majority of a secular thinking. They are demanding their fundamental civil rights. Their aim is to make their future better than their parents.

Regarding the why of the Arab uprisings it is important to understand this in light of the following:

- Long decades of dictatorships that systematically apply oppression, deprivation of rights, exclusion, etc

- Absence of rule of law and independent judiciary

- Abuse of the use of emergency laws

- Extended and deeply rooted corruption

- Widespread illiteracy, compounded with a big knowledge gap

- High levels of poverty with large percentage of citizens living under extremely poverty lines like in Egypt.

- Excluded youth, with unbearable numbers of unemployed people who are deprived of real opportunities.

- Women that suffer from persisting exclusion, socially, economically and politically.

- Inadequate legal and institutional frameworks those are not able to serve the cause of much needed development and delivery of basic services.

- Etc.

As for the who of the uprisings, it is absolutely clear that those who took out to the street, crying for freedom, dignity and better opportunities, mainly belong to the young population. This is a direct result of a number of factors, mainly the fact that the population of most Arab societies is to a remarkable extent young. In Egypt for examples over 63% of the population is of a young

age. Other factors include the high vulnerability of the youth to the above list of reasons underlying the revolutionary movements, as they are the ones that especially suffer from exclusion and lack of horizons.

The availability of modern technology, including the social media, whose use expanded rapidly among the youth, is an additional important factor to be considered. Indeed, a young Arab is simply able to access the information about the daily real lives of others online and in real time (Here and now). This legitimately drives the youth to raise the question of "why not me?". They also quickly discovered the great potentials of the tools in their hands, thus creating their own spheres where they shared their concerns and frustrations and were able to identify common goals and spontaneously organize themselves to collectively demand their very basic and at times simple rights and aspirations.

Encouraging Sectarian feelings as a political strategy of dictatorial regimes

Under long lasting dictator rules, what used to look like sectarian violence always turned out to be a well-orchestrated political strategy by the ruling governments. In fact the social fabric certainly have provided such regimes with an opportunity to encourage and abuse sectarian feelings, through invented violence most of the time, to insure the continuation of their rule, while presenting themselves as the protectors of minorities and prosecutors of extremists

The examples that we see inside many Arab countries of the above strategies are to a large extent a direct consequence of those very practices. Moreover, the effects of such cases of violence are not limited to the Arab societies, but are reaching beyond them. This was the case with the assassination of the American ambassador in Libya, on the grounds of what may be a sectarian conflict stemming from the production by a Christian Egyptian of an offensive film for the Muslims.

Accepting the other

Much of what has been said here may be in reality about the inability to properly accept the other. Such acceptance should certainly mean the ability to tolerate and accommodate those who think, believe and behave differently, whether from a political, cultural or religious point of view.

However, acceptance should not mean a limitation on the right to criticize or to express one's own views freely. But at the same time criticism should be made with respect in order to avoid becoming an offence. Freedom of expression is a fundamental right that nevertheless can easily cause a lot of damage when it is abused in an offensive way. The famous cartoons case or the more recent film "innocence of Muslims" are clear examples of offensive expressions that are not very well understood by all. But what may help understand them is to think of similar cases not less offensive and equally important, like the well know "Davinci Code" film that was widely rejected. Having said this, it is important not to forget the differences in context, social realities, levels of education, levels of frustration, as well as exposure to the democratic behaviors

Finally the social and governmental institutional setups can have a big influential role in shaping up the nature popular reactions. There is certainly a big difference between a democratic

government that is accountable to its people and a government that saves no efforts to make use of all pretexts to achieve its own goals completely ignoring the needs and aspirations of social peace for its people.

Minorities in Egypt

To talk about a Christian minority in Egypt is to talk about a population of over twenty Million people. This figure is much bigger than the entire population of many European countries. It is actually more than double the size of the Danish population.

Their exclusion or inclusion in the political process does not depend on the fact that there is currently an Islamist government in the country. As a matter of fact they did not enjoy better conditions of inclusion under the fallen regime. In my opinion this very much depends on their own willingness to engage, to participate and to continue to live in Egypt and behave simply as Egyptians as they have done for centuries.

Karim MEJRI, Tunisia

10 stereotypes about Liberty & Democracy in Tunisia (and how to break them)

The Tunisian Revolution was the starting point of a wider regional protest movement, commonly referred to as the 'Arab Spring'. Protestors asked for Employment, Liberty and Dignity. In Tunisia, the events shook the entire country for several weeks and have led to a deep political reshuffles. A lot was achieved and a lot has yet to be done.

This paper aims at addressing 10 stereotypes about the revolution in Tunisia and its people's aspiration to liberty and democracy. Stereotypes discussed herein are the occasion to narrate and recall the events of the Tunisian Revolution:

- It all started on December 17th, 2010 in Sidi Bouzid, when a man set himself on fire
- Mohamed Bouazizi (the man who set himself on fire) was a university graduate
- The former President fled the country because he was afraid of the demonstrations
- Facebook and other social media were the reason why the revolution succeeded
- Tunisians call their revolution "the Revolution of Jasmine"
- Despite the revolution, the situation did not improve in Tunisia
- The Arab Spring was the result of a US secret plan
- Tunisian voters elected an Islamist party during the first free elections in the country's history
- The government in Tunisia wants to restore polygamy
- Revolutions in Arab countries are more or less the same

This paper suggests some methods and ideas for high school teachers in Denmark to help them give their students a comprehensive and objective image of what really happened.

Some sources are listed at the end of the paper and could constitute a possible material for teachers to use in lesson planning.

The Author

Karim Mejri is 30 years old and holds an engineering degree and a Master's degree in innovation from French top universities. He is currently a Strategy and Management consultant at Numu Consulting, an emerging consulting cabinet in the MENA region. He has a thorough knowledge of the Tunisian society as he was adviser to the Employment Minister in the Tunisian Transitional Government, after the revolution in 2011. He is a co-founder of Cahiers de la Liberté, a Paris-based association, promoting freedom and democracy in Tunisia. He is also an active member of Atuge organization, which brings together Tunisian engineers and managers graduated from French universities. He published many articles about the situation in Tunisia in the association journal and in alternative media.

Introduction

On December 17th, 2010, a man setting himself on fire in the city of Sidi Bouzid in Tunisia initiated a large-scale movement of protests, leading to several revolutions in several Arab countries. 2 years after the beginning, this movement, called the "Arab Spring", is not yet over.

The representation of the Arab Spring in the media suffers from many stereotypes and deluded ideas. Even though the Arab Spring was ignited in Tunisia, the media focus more on events in Egypt, Libya or Syria. This presentation is an attempt to break some of the stereotypes about the revolution in Tunisia, and to clarify some aspects of its people's aspiration to liberty and democracy. It intends to help Danish high school teachers to understand and teach about the Arab Spring more properly. It also tries to give the teachers insider information as well as teaching methods.

10 stereotypes about Democracy and Liberty in Tunisia

1. It all started on December 17th, 2010 in Sidi Bouzid, when a man set himself on fire

The anger against the defunct regime of ben Ali started long time ago. For years, opposition, human rights activists and journalists fought for freedom and democracy. Social protests reached an unprecedented point in January 2008, in the region of Gafsa (a mining region 350 km to the South West of Tunis, capital of Tunisia). During 6 months, an important social movement shook many cities, especially Redeyef. Protesters were demanding employment, economic development and social justice. Although r rich in phosphate (Tunisia was the 5th phosphate exporter worldwide in 2010), the region suffers from poor infrastructure and high unemployment rate (highest in Tunisia among university graduates), while phosphate extraction caused health problems among the population, mainly cancer. The authorities bloodily repressed this pacific movement of protest. 4 people were shot dead, while hundreds of young men were arrested and underwent alleged acts of torture.

These events are considered as the beginning of the process leading to the Tunisian revolution, a year and a half later, in late 2010. After the revolution, the victims of the 2008 repression were recognized as martyrs by the new regime. The fight of the

population of Gafsa continues until now, under the leadership of a charismatic trade union representative, Adnen Hajji.

A demonstration in Redeyef, during 2008

2. Mohamed Bouazizi (the man who set himself on fire) was a university graduate

It has been proved, a few weeks after Ben Ali left the country, that Mohamed Bouazizi was not a university graduate. Information broadcasted about him in the early days of the uprising was largely false. A committee that was formed by local intelligentsia just a couple of days after this tragic event played a major role in spreading this rumor through national and international media. In his native city of Sidi Bouzid, as many university graduates were obliged to work in poorly paid jobs; rumors were not so strange to reality.

Bouazizi was a street vendor, but he did not hold any university diploma. Exact circumstances of his dispute with a female official agent, who confiscated his wheelbarrow, are not clear. Allegations of humiliation were not attested and Fayda Hamdi, the official municipal agent, was released by judicial authorities, months after the fact findings, with media presenting her as a scapegoat.

Bouazizi did not intend to start a revolution. His despair and anger led him to set fire on himself on December 17th, 2010. Demonstrations, strikes and social unrest all over the country led to the departure of the President, on January 14th, 2011, just 10 days after Bouazizi died of his injuries.

Former president Ben Ali visiting Bouazizi at the hospital, on Dec. 28th, 2010

Bouazizi died on January 4th, 2011; Ben Ali left the country on January 14th, 2011

3. The former President fled the country because he was afraid of the demonstrations

On Friday, January 14th, 2011, the uprising reached an unprecedented level with demonstrations taking place in front of the Ministry of Interior in Tunis. The president and his family left the country on a flight around 6 p.m. giving neither a speech nor an explanation to his people. People and media were talking about him fleeing the country as a direct consequence of the general anger in the country. Later on, the chief of presidential guards declared he pushed the president to leave the country temporarily because he was afraid of alleged assassination attempt. The pilot of the airplane that transported Ben Ali to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, confirmed that Ben Ali intended to go back to Tunis the next morning.

Many conspiracy theories flourished. Officials are giving contradictory versions, while the former president, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, is subjected to censorship by Saudi authorities, who prevent him from giving any political declaration in exchange of not extraditing himback to Tunis.

The departure of the President Ben Ali changed Tunisian politics forever. The Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi took over power the evening of January 14th, and then the president of the legislative chamber replaced him the next day in a constitutional way, preventing Ben Ali from coming back to Tunisia as the Head of State. The new president was forced by continuing protests to launch a democratization process.

This was the first real deep change of the Arab Spring movement and it inspired Egyptians to put pressure on their own president, Hosni Mubarak to leave power. January 14th is now celebrated in Tunisia as the Revolution and Youth Day

Presidential airplane preparing to take-off in Tunis-Carthage airport, with Zine El Abidine Ben Ali onboard, Jan. 14th, 2011

4. Facebook and other social media were the reason why the revolution succeeded

Social media, mainly Facebook, played a key role in spreading the news of the uprising inside and outside Tunisia. Users of social media exchanged videos of police violence and dead people during the repression of the protests. The public opinion shifted quickly, especially when it became obvious that official media were lying. Nevertheless, the role of internet should not be overrated. In fact, access to internet was not very common in the regions where the revolution started. In addition, many resources online were blocked by the authorities, who censored any dissonant voices and struggled to prevent the news to spread on the net.

Cyber resistance in Tunisia is active on the net since late 1990's, with famous web magazines and forums such as Tunezine and Takriz, and more recently Nawaat. Some Tunisian bloggers used to criticize the regime during the second half of the 2000 decade. Facebook and social media appeared later in the resistance movement and helped to spread critical ideas about the tyranny and the corruption of the regime.

On the ground, demonstrations and strikes were not organized through Facebook. Anonymous militants, desperate youth, as well as lawyers and labor unionists in every town organized strikes and demonstrations by their own means.

Caricature by Tunisian caricaturist _Z_, whose paintings were largely spread on the internet during the revolution period. Translation: Ben Ali celebrating the first anniversary of the International Year of Youth

5. Tunisians call their revolution "the Revolution of Jasmine"

After January 14th, 2011, Western media and foreign reporters (like French online magazine Rue89) started to talk of the Tunisian revolution as the "Revolution of Jasmine". But most Tunisians, especially the inhabitants of the regions where the revolt started, refuse this denomination.

Jasmine is a characteristic flower of Tunisia, used in traditional bouquets and necklaces. It is very often used in touristic advertisements. The Tunisian revolution grew up in non-touristic regions, among disinherited and unemployed population. The Jasmine does not reflect the tough conditions that caused the uprising; it reflects rather a romantic, folkloric and partial image of Tunisia. In addition, the protests took place in winter whereas the jasmine season is summer.

Tunisians prefer to call their revolution "The Revolution of Liberty and Dignity". In fact, just after the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, slogans in the demonstrations claimed "Employment, Liberty, and national Dignity". Liberty and Dignity are, for demonstrators, the aspiration to break from tyrannical power, mafia networks controlling the economy and arrogant and incompetent local officials.

Left: traditional jasmine bouquets, right: prickly pear, a plant spread in Thala, an in-land town in which 9 young men were shot dead on January 9th, 2011

6. Despite the revolution, the situation did not improve in Tunisia

The political situation has changed a lot at the macro level, since January 14th, 2011:

- Overthrowing of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali who fled to Saudi Arabia
- Resignation of Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi
- Dissolution of the RCD, the former ruling party of Tunisia and liquidation of its assets
- Release and amnesty of political prisoners
- Elections of a Constituent Assembly on October 23rd, 2011

These achievements were reached thanks to social pressure and continuous protests. Nevertheless, in their daily life, Tunisians do not necessarily feel positive changes that occurred at the macro level. In fact, the economic situation is still very fragile, resulting in rising prices (inflation) and falling purchasing power. Many Tunisians have the feeling that "nothing has changed", or even "it was better before". Even at the political level, Tunisian citizens still experience violent repression from authorities during pacific demonstrations. Lately, on February 6th, 2013, the country has entered a new phase of violence with the assassination of Chokri Belaid, a far-left opposition leader. The last political assassination took place back in 1952, when unionist and national leader Farhat Hached was shot dead by a French colonialist band.

Left: Leftist leader Chokri Belaïd, shot dead in front of his home in the morning of February 6th, 2013
Right: Icon in Belaïd's memory

7. The Arab Spring was the result of a US secret plan

As of today, no evidence was given to prove that the social unrest and political changes in Tunisia resulted from a plot by foreign intelligence agencies. A few months before the revolution, Wikileaks revealed many cables of the US ambassador in Tunis, showing that the US was aware that the regime was corrupt and loosing popular support. However, the Government of the USA as well as all governments of Western countries, including France,

was surprised by the Tunisian revolution. In less than 4 weeks, the President and his government were overthrown, giving little time to foreign countries to react properly.

Afterwards, the USA gave official support to the Tunisian revolution. President Barack Obama declared in the 2011 joint session of the United States Congress that "the United States of America stands with the people of Tunisia and supports the democratic aspirations of all people"; senators and representatives stood up in a standing ovation.

The sparkle of the social uprising took place in far in-land regions. It was spontaneous and chaotic, merely supervised by lawyers and labor unionists. No single foreign agitator or fighter was identified. The existence of an internal or external plot is a very unlikely. There is almost no evidence that supports such claims. However, the intervention of foreign powers after the success of the revolution, as a support for some political parties, is not excluded. US officials have shown support to Islamist parties in many Arab countries, probably because they hope conservatives will preserve their interests in the region.

Standing ovation for the Tunisian people, Washington January 25th, 2011

8. Tunisian voters elected an Islamist party during the first free elections in the country's history

In late 2011, many observers started to talk about an Islamist Winter which is replacing the Arab Spring, because Islamists were winning elections in both Tunisia and Egypt. This observation was not very accurate at least in Tunisia.

In fact, in Tunisia, the democratization process led to free elections on October 23rd, 2011. Tunisian Islamist party, Ennahda, won 37% of the votes and 42% of the seats of the Constituent Assembly. The role of the elected Constituent Assembly is twofold: writing a new constitution for the country and nominating a transition government to rule the country. The coalition leading the government is composed, in addition of Ennahda, of 2 secular parties: Congress for the Republic (non-ideological party) and Ettakatol (a social-democratic formation). Islamists are forced to form a coalition with its secular allies, in addition to an opposition

mostly secular, but scattered. Almost all Tunisian parties are attached to the Arabic-Islamic identity of the Tunisian people and the secular modernist achievements of the modern Tunisian state.

Blue fingers have become the sign of participation to the elections, on Oct. 23rd, 2011

9. The government in Tunisia wants to restore polygamy

Polygamy was banned in Tunisia since August 13th, 1956. Late President Habib Bourguiba and part of the national elite of the time (including religious public figures) have issued laws that preserve women rights and limits repudiation. Bourguiba's regime gave women the right to vote since 1957, before it was given to women in Switzerland.

Islamist Party Ennahda insured, before taking power in late 2011, that women rights will be preserved. Polygamy is not part of the party's program. After a short controversy during 2012, the president of Ennahda, Rashid Ghannoushi, declared that his movement will not inscribe Sharia (Islamic law) in the new constitution. Today, a very few political parties of the far religious right are against women rights and call for polygamy.

10. Revolutions in Arab countries are more or less the same

It is important to be aware of the differences between the countries of the Arab Spring.

In Tunisia and Egypt, the social movement succeeded in overthrowing the corrupt and tyrannical leaders peacefully. Democratization process is progressing slowly, with Islamists dominating both political scenes. Islamists in Tunisia control 42% of the Constituent Assembly. Egypt has an elected Islamist president, while the parliament was suspended. With a few natural resources, both countries are facing severe economic challenges.

But perspectives cannot be exactly the same, as Egypt is 6 times bigger than Tunisia by area and 8 times by population.

In Libya and Syria, social movements turned into a civil war. In Libya, the foreign intervention of the NATO accelerated the fall of Kaddafi's regime. The Libyan leader was murdered in unclear circumstances, while violence has become a big problem for the current government. Revenues from oil could prevent Libya from major economic crisis, but the scars of the previous dictatorship and the civil war that the country went through are hard to erase. Syria is experiencing a slight different situation, with growing numbers of foreign Jihadists taking part in the battles against the government, not necessarily for democracy as many are motivated by theocracy. The spontaneous uprising in this country could be hijacked by the most violent and extremist Islamists.

In Yemen, political change happened within the existing political class, and former President Ali Abdallah Saleh was not prosecuted for the 33 years he passed as a Head of State. Protests in Bahrain are presented by the authorities as a Shiite revolt, not a revolt for democracy and freedom. Other social unrests in Arab countries were restrained by various constitutional, political and legal reforms (Morocco, Jordan, Algeria, etc.).

Tunisian and Egyptian flag at Tahrir Square, Cairo, Egypt, during the Egyptian revolution

How to break stereotypes: suggestion of methods and tools

It is not easy to teach historical events that are still taking place and whose consequences are not fully known yet. However, teachers could raise awareness among students and help them develop critical thinking towards images depicted by Western media.

Here are some examples of alternative methods that could be used by Danish teachers:

• Do not always trust the media. The media tend to simplify and summarize facts but they often use stereotypes as short-cuts either on purpose or by ignorance

• Choose diversified examples of events / countries / witnesses, in order to reflect the diversity of the Arab Spring phenomena

• Avoid misleading analogies with the fall of Berlin wall and political changes in Eastern Europe in late 80's

• Make students aware of the differences between each Arab country and emphasize the specific history and conditions of each one

• Promote direct contact between students and citizens in the countries of the Arab Spring (for example via social media and email exchange)

• Show and discuss multimedia resources: Photos, Videos, Books, Caricatures, Movies, Blogs, Facebook pages…

Resources

1. Videos in English

- Interview of President Marzouki with Julian Assange, on Russia Today

Julian Assange speaks with Tunisia's first post-revolution leader Moncef Marzouki about the West's double standards in protecting human rights. He is a former human rights activist.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=716vEbPPZgk

- Revolution Memories videos, by Tunisia Live

Interviews with different activists who played important roles during the uprising that ousted former Tunisia's dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali on January 14th, 2012

http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL93B9B7973AECE153

- Standing ovation in American Senate, in support of the Tunisian revolution

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rUjbtoSDWKY

2. Articles in English

- How a man setting fire to himself sparked an uprising in Tunisia

Article by Brian Whitaker on Dec. 28th, 2010 in the Guardian. One of the very first Western journalists to make the parallel with the Romanian revolution (1989)

www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/dec/28/tunisia-ben-ali

- Events in Tunisia

Blog posts by Brian Whitaker on events in Tunisia, January 2011

Including the translation of Ben Ali's speech on January 10th

www.al-bab.com/blog/2011/blog1101a.htm

- Tunisia's youth finally has revolution on its mind

Article by Tunisia young man, published by the Guardian on January 13th, 2011

www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/jan/13/tunisia-youth-revolution?CMP=twt_fd

- How Egyptian and Tunisian youth hacked the Arab Spring

Article by John Pollock on underground youth movements

http://www.technologyreview.com/featuredstory/425137/streetbook/

3. Caricatures

- Blog of _Z_

A famous and influent Tunisian caricaturist who did not reveal his real identity before and after the revolution

www.debatunisie.com

Hanna Ziadeh, Denmark/Lebanon

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Dr. Mu'ayyad Mehyar, Jordan

THE ROLE OF NHRISS

IN THE WAKE OF THE ARAB SPRING

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Arab World is at cross roads. It stands at the intersection of several major issues as a result of the so-called Arab Spring or the Arab Awakening or the Arab Uprising.

The social fabric of Arab countries, in transition, has been damaged by armed conflict and civil unrest, or at minimum, these countries are witnessing many difficulties ranging from the somehow prevalent and latent structures of the old regimes or the polarization between Non-secular and Secular groups or the absence of leaders who could bring about consensus on peaceful exchange of power that is based on respect for human rights and human dignity and who could help people set out their national priorities including redefining citizenship through new social contracts and new national charters/constitutions, leaders who could promote reconciliation and give a voice to those, direct and indirect victims, who have experienced human rights violations.

Therefore, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) in the region, more so in countries that witnessed radical change in the political regime, will have to look into functions specific to a post-conflict situation or post-dictatorship situation whereby they will have to operate as instruments for dealing with past abuses and deploy efforts at both reconciliation and justice in line with international norms

It is crucial therefore to review the status and functionality of NHRIs in the Arab World, so as to help bring them closer to the UN Paris Principles.

Many of these NHRIs, even those with an 'A Status' from the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights (ICC), have provided a smoke-screen for the actions of despotic and non-democratic regimes. The existence of an "A status" NHRI in the country has given an impression that those regimes were compliant with international principles of human rights, when in fact the NHRIs in question were not independent from government at all in practice.

As such, they were incapable of accurately and objectively reflecting the status of human rights in their countries. NHRIs have been incapable of investigating or documenting serious human rights violations taking place in countries in the region. They have also been unable to provide advice to their governments to adopt laws and policies consistent with the country's international human rights treaty obligations. The recent political changes witnessed in numerous Arab countries have brought new challenges, but also important opportunities for NHRIs to (re)establish the confidence of the Arab public in them as relevant actors in protecting and promoting democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

For a NHRI to play an effective role, it must function in accordance with the UN Paris Principles. A crucial principle and condition for the effectiveness of every NHRI is; its independence, as it will be in a better position to fulfill its mandate without interference. Further crucial principles and standards are related to NHRIs' mandates including having broad mandates covering promotion, monitoring and protection of human rights. Further, NHRIs should deal with, and cover, all human rights (civil and political, economic, social and cultural, and should not be limited to rights in their respective national constitutions. Moreover, in order to priorities addressing the most important human rights issues in the most effective way, according to context, other actors, resources and competencies must be considered.

In countries in transition toward democracy, NHRIs may play, according to their mandate as per the UN Paris Principles, a more central role, than in democratic countries, as they could provide a viable forum for the investigation and resolution of human rights complaints given that the judicial system is weak, politicized, slow or otherwise incapacitated. In addition, a NHRI may be able to develop a stronger human rights culture in the state in transition, and thereby contribute to the democratization process.

The Arab Spring has transformed the political map of the Middle East. Some countries have experienced violent or dramatic changes of government. Others have experienced more incremental change; albeit changes that are nevertheless linked to the developments elsewhere in the region. Countries such as Egypt, Tunisia and Libya have experienced democratic election. Constitution reform processes have taken place or have been initiated in Morocco, Jordan, Tunisia, Yemen, Libya, and Egypt. Institutional and structural reforms are planned or are being discussed, as are Truth and Reconciliation Commissions or reparations programs to address human rights violations committed by former regimes or violations which took place during the period of transition.

The changes are similar in some ways to those which took place in countries in Eastern and Southern Europe during the 1990s where populations which had suffered under dictatorships obtained their freedom and faced the challenge of reforming laws and rebuilding state institutions reflecting principles of democracy, human rights, accountability and rule of law. Reforming laws and institutions and identifying a new set of national symbols and values in a way that engages all relevant interest groups in society is a very difficult and time-consuming process. NHRIs bring to such discussions their expert knowledge of the international human rights principles and examples of how human rights have been applied in constitutions and in national development plans in other countries. NHRIs can also bring to these discussions the importance of engaging all social groups in a national-building process, including ethnic or religious minorities. They can emphasize the importance of human rights principles such as non-discrimination and equal treatment, public participation in governance processes, accountability of the State and of State agents, and the importance of administrative and justice systems that function effectively and are accessible to ordinary people.

So, NHRIs could be/are crucial change agents and can potentially act as bridges between their respective states and public in critical periods of transition and reform. Today and following the recent developments in the Arab World, NHRIs have a window of opportunity to contribute to the development of human rights reform and dialogue processes that will take place due to regime changes, due to their unique position acting as catalysts and promoters for human rights reforms including building an intercultural dialogue, diversity and harmonious relationships amongst different societies, communities, groups, organizations, and individuals.

Further, NHRIs should advise government and parliament on key reforms and policies and their human rights compliance standards and applications. On the other hand, if NHRIs cannot assume their full mandate due to political circumstances, then they should at least monitor the human rights status, document it and prepare different status reports including assessment and evaluation reports.

In countries in transition, the work on constitutional reform or constitution building is, I trust, the most important work that a country could/should work on to establish the framework for building a human rights culture as constitution building or reform that includes and permits the participation of all legitimate groups, actors and stakeholders is more likely to result in institutional choices that strengthen democratization and human rights. It is of paramount importance here to ensure that the reformed constitution or the building of a new one includes values and principles for a human rights-culture in the society based on international human rights norms and instruments. Here comes the role of NHRIs to promote such an action and to prepare the necessary and relevant proceedings as a suggested proposal for consideration.

In the Arab World, there are eight accredited NHRIs by the ICC of NHRIs; six have A accreditation, Morocco, Jordan, Egypt, Palestine, Qatar, and Mauritania, and while two have B accreditation; Algeria and Tunisia. In Bahrain, Oman, Iraq, Sudan and Libya institutions have been established recently and in accordance with the Paris Principles but they have not yet been considered for ICC accreditation. On the other hand Lebanon and Yemen are considering establishing NHRIs in accordance with the UN Paris Principles.

What is A NHRI?

A NHRI is an administrative body set up in to protect, promote and monitor human rights in a given country. It is an independent state institution. However, it is not subject to instructions from any of the state powers as it operates in accordance with the rule of law principles set forth by the UN Paris Principles. The purpose of the NHRI is to create a common understanding of human rights and freedoms in society and especially in the decision-making processes of all of the power structures. It, also, cooperates with other NHRIs, primarily under the ICC umbrella, and with the UN and other regional human rights structures.

The UN Paris Principles

The universally accepted framework for NHRIs adopted in 1991 and approved by the UN General Assembly in 1993. According to the Paris Principles, section A, a NHRI shall, all with respect to the promotion and protection of human rights:

1. Advise government, parliament and any other competent body on legislative or administrative provisions and make recommendations to ensure adherence to fundamental principles of human rights and harmonisation with international human rights instruments to which the State is a party, including recommending adoption of new legislation, amendment of legislation in force, and adoption or amendment of administrative measures;

2. Advise on any situation of violation of human rights;

3. Prepare reports on the national human rights situation;

4. Draw the attention of government to human rights violations, make proposals for relevant initiatives, and express an opinion on the positions and reactions of the government;

5. Encourage ratification of international human rights instruments and ensure their implementation;

6. Contribute to state reports to UN bodies and regional institutions, with due respect for its independence;

7. Cooperate with UN agencies, regional institutions and other NHRIs;

8. Assist in formulation of programmes for teaching of and research into human rights and to take part in their execution in schools, universities and professional circles;

9. Publicise human rights and efforts to combat all forms of discrimination, in particular racial discrimination, by increasing public awareness, especially through information and education and by making use of all press organs; and

Hear and consider complaints in individual cases (this is not mandatory according to the Paris Principles.

THE ARAB SPRING OR THE ARAB AWAKENING OR THE ARAB UPRISING: DEVELOPMENT SO FAR

♣ More than two years have passed since the dawn of the "Arab Spring", starting with the popular uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt. The situation in practically the whole of the Arab world remains highly fluid yet important differences have emerged among and between the countries and the regions. While overall significant progress has been made in promoting democratic reforms (e.g. holding of elections in line with democratic standards, strengthening of the role of civil society, increased freedom of expression and assembly) many obstacles still need to be overcome in order for these transitions to be successfully consolidated.

♣ Outstanding security challenges remain, first and foremost the on-going civil war in Syria with its evident risks of spill-over to neighbours, graphically illustrated by the already one million of refugees who have flowed into neighbouring countries such as Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey and at least two million of internally displaced Syrians.

♣ Of concern are the internal security threats that Libya continues to face, (even as it proceeds with the long process of state-building), and instability among some of its neighbours, highlighted by the on-going conflict in Mali, as well as the recent terrorist attack on a strategic Algerian gas facility.

♣ At the same time the social cohesion of some Arab countries undergoing transition risks being undermined by new forms of internal political polarisation, (between secular and Islamist forces, but also between and among affected groups such as women, young people, religious and racial minorities), as well as by a deteriorating economic situation.

♣ In light of the entire severe and unlawful situation and because people, especially YOUTH, were no longer willing to live under repressive rulers who governed for decades, the demands for participation in the political system were/are highlighted with a call for human rights and especially human dignity, the universal concept underlying human rights.

♣ Arab YOUTH are no longer willing to continue to live under repressive regimes, that they, their parents and their grandparents have lived under for decades

♣ The protests were/are also conveying a clear message to the world that having strategic alliances with dictators to ensure stability at the expense of human rights and democracy would not ensure, in the end of the day, a lasting stability and security in the region and if human rights and democracy entail certain inherent risks, the denial of freedom carries much more significant long-term dangers.

♣ Lip service to reform will not be enough. The populations in the Arab world (especially YOUTH) are calling for real and sustained political reform processes.

The Future of the Arab Uprising

In order to shed light on some possibilities for the future, I think we need to understand that the Arab Spring was a historic moment in the politics of the Arab World, but its long-term impact remains unpredictable... and thus some remarks and questions to be highlighted here are as follows:

♣ Islamic tide is rising in the Arab world, but does Islam contradict democratic values in matters related to minorities and does Sharia law uphold justice and freedom? Does Sharia law polarize society, so it is better excluding it from the constitution, as Tunisian Nahdha party did, and how to strike a balance between national reconciliation and accountability in the pursuit of transitional justice? Moreover, would Islamists preserve political, cultural and religious pluralism, how? Would they foster women's political participation and ensure equality and equal opportunities for women and men alike? However, what is most important to focus on by international actors, is the very specific issue of emphasis on international human rights standards, the maintenance of existing treaty relationships, and the principle of peaceful settlement of international disputes.

♣ The fundamental issue that has been at stake over the last six decades in MENA is the failure of MENA states in founding a common developmental perception of citizenship among the citizens and the public servants, which then was transformed negatively not only on the citizens' relation with the state, but also on their perception and practice of how they relate to each other on the one hand and on classifying citizen layers per origin, economic, social and political status; (i,e) indigenous people, political leaders in power, tribes, migrants, refugees and minorities on the other hand. Such negative transformation strengthened bonds of care/custodianship across boundaries of tribalism, localism, political affiliation, inequality, exclusion, ideologies, religion, power, nation and geography and even lead to destructive individualism and to creating a generation with a built in sceptic concept of who is a citizen. However, in the wake of the Arab Uprising, there is a potential for forming news paradigms that would make a shift in how people perceive and practice their citizenship and how they relate to their governments and to each other. This paradigm shift should be based on the founding blocks of human rights norms and standards that are enshrined in the international human rights law

♣ Some influential political currents are already calling for western-style democracies and governance. But there is also support for Islamists of various kinds and/or support for non-secular democracies taking into account that religions in the Arab World and MENA are key and occupy a vital and determining space and role in the Arab society. If you ask how

important religion is in the lives of people in Europe, the answer is around 30 per cent. But in MENA it is around 95 per cent.

♣ What I think here is that we should care less who comes to power as long as all adhere to principles, practices and applications of cultural, religious and political pluralism from one end and good governance practices from another end ensuring freedom and dignity for all individuals and groups.

♣ However, it is not true that a stance of non-interference and of leaving everything to home-grown reform is the best way to ensure a good outcome. This involves huge challenges and requires substantial support from the west so that they are able to move quickly towards a healthy pluralist states and societies with good governance practices and applications, where equality is mainstreamed and diversity is valued and managed.

Some more questions and remarks

♣ What roles can the Civil Society Play in the transition to Democracy process?

♣ Should it continue to play the same role which it was playing before the transition or should it transform its role, to what?

♣ Instead of working in opposition to the state, civil society has to help construct and advocate for a democratic state that is responsive to popular needs, rights and attitudes.

♣ Civil Society should monitor the state performance and insist on its accountability and transparency

♣ Civil Society must also encourage citizen activism and engagement in solving practical problems, foster tolerance and inclusiveness and non-violence

♣ What about other key actors like NHRIs?

♣ NHRIs together with civil society must begin the process of bringing social reality and respect for rights in line with new democratic aspirations and values and in line with international human rights norms and standards.

♣ Independent NHRIs contribute to the development of human rights reform and dialogue processes that will take place due to regime changes which are happening in the region right now. This requires that more work needs to be done with NHRIs as they have a unique position that often means that they can function as a sort of neutral meeting ground for actors from state and civil society, thus facilitating dialogue.

♣ Another, more practical, reason for engaging in National Human Rights Institutions level dialogue is that in authoritarian states, this institution might be the only possible venue for discussing human rights as civil society is weak or non-existent

♣ Some say: The Arab Spring has turned into an Arab Fall. Yesterday's reformers rebels are today's tyrants. It is all about power and not principles. The face and name of oppressors have changed but no progress in development, economy, democracy, human rights or education

♣ Some others might say: where exactly did it happen that the actual "reformer rebels" assume power? The fact that the Islamists

rode the wave and took advantage of the situation in Egypt and Tunisia does not make them reformists, nor rebels

♣ Is it a question of a unifying the constitution, a reference charter document with underlying principles that ALL agree upon (that is for power sharing). For example, whether one is left/right, conservative/liberal, religious/irreligious, etc. a constitution that is based on a broad consensus.

♣ The power of popular protest has made every regime across the region, to worry.

That is Good...BUT

♣ The Future of the region will depend also on how protestors will move quickly from deconstructing suppressive regimes to constructing ones that adhere to principles, practices and applications of cultural, religious and political pluralism from one end and good governance practices from another end ensuring freedom and dignity for all

Also

♣ Without an economic spur, all of the political reform and passion will eventually collide with the tedious non-"negotiables" of daily life that would sap any revolution of its idealism. And here comes the question: How do the new ruling elites set about reorganising the economy to meet the unfulfilled aspirations of their populations?