



Friedrich Naumann
STIFTUNG FÜR DIE FREIHEIT

Freedom of Association

Invitation to
2nd International conference on

Promoting Government-Civil Society Dialogue
And Reforming Laws

Under the patronage of his Excellency Amer Mousa
General Secretary of the Arab League

Cairo, Egypt 17-18 January 2008



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Background Information

On June 28-29 2007 the Arab League hosted the first international conference: "Laws Reform: Between Reality and Aspirations" organized by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation and the Civil Society Commission of the Arab League

This conference took place in the framework of the EU co financed project on "enhancing legal framework of associations through national dialogue and empowerment of civil society". Please visit www.arab-laws-reform.net for further information on the project.

Representatives of Arab League bodies and of both Arab governments and civil society discussed with international and Arab lawyers and academicians guiding principles for the freedom of associations in the Arab World. In the discussions, the three main laws with great impact on the democratization process: The Political parties' law, the labour law, and the NGO law, were carefully scrutinised. The intensive dialogue between the different concerned parties focussed on the importance of continued dialogue in order to reach a consensus on common grounds.

The guidelines that have been agreed upon do not express the maximum amount of freedom that is aspired but reflect the compromise that can be reached between governments and civil society. The guidelines can equally be found on the above mentioned website.

The Cairo conference hence initiated the new ambitious phase of the project: a national consultation processes around these guidelines in the five countries involved in the freedom of association project: Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine and Egypt.

In national focus group discussions per law decision makers, legislators, representatives of political



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parties, NGOs and labour unions discuss the concerns raised by governments. On the other hand civil society organisations voice their opinion. The results of these focus group meetings will be summarised in national policy papers which will formulate best means to crystallise these concerns through a number of recommendations targeting governments, CSOs, and the international community.

Arab and international experts in constitutional law will additionally comment on the national policy papers which in the end aim at concrete proposals for draft laws or law amendments.

Conference Information

On 17th and 18th of January 2008, the second international conference will be held in Cairo, Egypt under the auspices of the Arab League and the Civil Society Commission of the Arab League. Different related departments such as the Council of the Arab Ministers of Justice, the Arab Parliament, the Arab Labour Organization, the Arab Centre for Legal and Judicial Research will be invited to participate in order to highlight the Arab League reform endeavours. The invitees will be representatives of Arab governments, legislators, parliamentarians, representatives of civil society organizations, national and international networks and organizations and concerned UN bodies.

Objectives

The conference aims at promoting genuine reform attempts within the Arab World from Arab governments and Arab civil society which will contribute to political stability and democratisation.

Highlighting the common aspirations of governments and civil society, the conference aims at creating a coordination mechanism between civil society organizations, governments and the existing Arab League bodies in order to achieve legal reform for the three laws: NGO laws, political parties' laws and labour union laws.



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Expected Results

1. greater acceptance of participating governments to strengthen the democratization process.
2. improved dialogue between governments and CSOs
3. understanding of and commitment to political and legislative reform as a critical factor in the democratization process.
4. concrete steps to enlarge and enhance dialogue with civil society organizations.
5. continued dialogue between civil society and government bodies.

In particular, the conference is expected to lead to a joint agenda or time-action plan indicating not only guidelines for dialogue and cooperation between governments and CSOs on the three laws but result into concrete commitments by both sides. The time-action plan will be based on the results obtained from the national consultation process and further enhanced on the regional level. It will also establish a mechanism for cooperation and coordination on the Arab level with a distinguished role of a specific Arab League body in establishing a coordination mechanism.

The conference will also take note of other results reached by similar initiatives on the Arab and international level on the issue of freedom of association such as the project of UNDP-POGAR, the Arab Reform Initiative, the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network, the ICNL and establish links with these initiatives and mechanisms for future cooperation.

Agenda

Theme 1

The Arab League and Reform: Institutions, processes, actors, legal competencies, decision making and mechanisms and their effectiveness. A general assessment of above since Tunis declaration in 2004.

The European vision and commitment to reform in the Arab world: mechanism adopted, initiatives taken, and achievements reached. A critical assessment of what has



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so far been achieved starting with the Barcelona process and reaching the EU neighbourhood policy.

Theme 2: reflection of national consultation process in the papers prepared by the national experts and comments by international and regional expertise

- Internal security: Islamist challenges to governments political legitimacy, challenges posed by religious, ethnic and sectarian divides and economic constraints
- External security: Regional neighbours and international politics.
- Government's concerns with regards to the nature and development of CSO: Emergence of CSOs and transformation in roles, legal and structural barriers. Assessment of achievements and challenges

This theme will also dwell on the following questions: How to best address these concerns in formulating laws according to international standards? Are there successful experiences in this regard? Would such an approach be feasible in the Arab countries?

Theme 3

What kind of a dialogue needed between Arab Governments and Arab civil society and what is the mechanism of such dialogue? Internally (locally), on the Arab level, on the European level and the role of the international community

Theme 4

Formulation of national and regional policies benefiting from experiences from the Arab world and from Europe

Paper submission

The agenda will be on the basis of the input of our participants therefore we would very much appreciate your ideas and contributions to theme 1 and theme 3. Theme 2 will be elaborated by the national experts, Theme 4 should be on the basis of interactive workshops per law.



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Paper titles and abstracts must be submitted by November 30th and full papers by January 2nd, 2008

Submissions should be sent via email to
Ubab Murad (Arabic - English)

Email: ubab.murad@fnst.org

Or

Annemie De Winter (English abstracts only)

Email: annemie.dewinter@fnst.org

A detailed conference agenda will be available in
December, 2007

Participants

- Arab League institutions
- Arab governments and legislators
- Arab civil society organizations
- Arab Academics and intellectuals
- Arab and international experts
- Concerned international organizations
- UN related bodies
- EU concerned bodies

Language of the Conference

Arabic language will be the main language of the conference. Simultaneous translation into English will be provided

Logistic Issues

Arrival Cairo will be on the 16th of January

Departure on the 19th of January

Venue of the conference will be the Arab League premises

Hotel will be confirmed at a later stage

Conference dates are 17-18 January 2008.

Organizers will cover the transportation and accommodation of participants from 8 Arab countries: Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria and the accommodation of Egyptian participants coming from outside Cairo.



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Organizers will also cover the accommodation of Arab government representatives coming from other Arab countries. Travel expenses are to be covered by participating countries.

International organizations are encouraged to participate in this very important event. Cost of travel and accommodation to be directly covered by international organizations. Organizers will provide logistic support and meals during the event.

For further information and updates on the event please visit the following link:
www.arab-laws-reform.net

Follow-up

The conference is not intended as an end in itself, but rather a step on the path of establishing links, mechanisms and future cooperation procedures on the operative level as well as on the political level.

The project supports the definition and realization of cooperation mechanism between the Arab League and CSOs on the three laws. Participants in this conference are encouraged to formulate concrete suggestions and action plans for the realization of sustainability and continuity to be discussed in the international conference