



## THE PARLIAMENTARY NETWORK

On The World Bank & International Monetary Fund

### *Parliamentarians & Development Series*

## Good Governance in the MENA Region

### Overview

The Arab Spring in several countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is a landmark uprising against totalitarian regimes. While it is true that the recent revolts in Egypt, Libya, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen were a starting point for an overhaul of political systems in the region, so far only Egypt, Tunisia and Libya have managed to free themselves of their old rulers. Even so, demonstrations continue in Cairo and elsewhere as civilians persist in their calls for democracy.

The **Egypt revolution** is still ongoing in practice. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) has been at the centre of concerns about human rights violations since its accession to power in February 2011. Nevertheless, in December 2011, the SCAF appeared to withdraw a plan for extending its influence over the writing of a new constitution. Beforehand, it considered giving the military a strong presence in the civilian government, and potentially even shielding the military budget from public or parliamentary scrutiny. The task will be given to a newly elected Parliament though. Even if the military were to provide guarantees for national unity, protect the secular character of the state, and protect liberals from an Islamist-based constitution, it is crucial to put the military under civilian control and scrutiny. On 23 January 2012, the new Parliament will now hold its first session. But 99% of the new parliamentarians are male, only 1% is female. The composition of the Parliament clearly demonstrates gender inequality and the failure to implement democracy.

The revolution spread to Libya, Syria, and Yemen, where clashes between civilians and government forces have led to a dire humanitarian situation on the ground and are posing long-term challenges for development. By mid-January 2012, numerous protestors and other civilians were killed, and many other were reported to be in custody or simply missing. The economies of these countries have virtually collapsed.

In **Yemen**, demonstrators called for the resignation of President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Clashes between protestors and government forces have allegedly led to human rights violations. After months of protest, Mr. Saleh signed an agreement on November 23, 2011 that immediately transferred power to his vice president. Presidential elections are set for February 21, 2012. The uncertainty about the country's political future combined with rising food prices and shortages of electricity, water and fuel have left the country in a state of emergency. It is likely that the political crisis will remain acute due to the tribal culture, topography, high poverty and deeply entrenched government corruption.

**Libya** had spent more than 40 years under the leadership of Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, who was captured and killed by rebels in October 2011. The issue of the militia leaders – who want to preserve their autonomy and protect their respective regions – is currently one of the most urgent issues facing the new provisional government. In January 2012, the interim government published a draft law laying out procedures for electing a planned constitutional assembly. Yet, the most delicate organizational issues – such as districts and the electoral system chosen for the elections - remain unanswered by the draft law. These issues are particularly difficult due to the spectrum of different regions and groups. The draft law would allocate 10% of the seats in the assembly to women.

In December 2011, the UN characterized **Syria** as being on the verge of a civil war. Already in August 2011, the UN released a report on human rights abuses in Syria, considering that Syrian forces committed “gross violations” of human rights. The U.S. and the EU called for Syria’s president, Bashar al-Assad, to step down. In late November 2011, the Arab League expelled Syria and imposed economic sanctions. In December 2011, the EU also imposed sanctions against Syrian finance and economy ministers and companies. In January 2012, the EU has already agreed to 11 rounds of sanctions against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad: 120 people and companies are targeted so far by an assets freeze and travel ban. In addition, the EU is enforcing an arms embargo and a ban on imports of Syrian crude oil.

### **The Need for Good Governance**

Governance denotes the manner in which the executive of a state and its agencies manage a country’s economic and social resources. It can be a measure of a government’s effectiveness in general or in a certain context. With recent and upcoming elections in Egypt, Tunisia, and several other MENA countries at risk of revolutionary spill-over (for ex. Bahrain, Morocco, and Oman), good governance will be a key building block for establishing the new regimes. Good governance, in the form of improved rule of law as well as political stability, has the potential to promote competition and attract investment, and therefore, creating an environment for sustainable economic growth.

Considering the fragile situation in place in many of the MENA region countries, the primary building blocks in establishing good governance have to be based on citizen security, justice and the creation of jobs. This can be achieved through community-based programmes for violence prevention and ensuring access to local justice services. Paired to this, institutional transformation in the areas of security and justice is necessary, as well as budget and expenditure transparency to avoid covert and criminal networks during the transition phase. Illicit financial flows – from public accounts or from natural resource trafficking – have to be halted. Job creation programmes need a pragmatic approach that fits local conditions. Private sector regulations have to be simplified to encourage entrepreneurship. The focus has to be also on establishing infrastructure in the areas of electricity and transport. Women have to be integrated into the social and economic systems not only through early-life schooling but also through training programmes later in life.

Especially in fragile states, there is a lack of trust in public institutions, which has to be re-established through anti-corruption initiatives that demonstrate that new initiatives can be well governed. Transparent publication of expenditure and community/civil society monitoring to ensure that public funds and aid reach their intended targets can help install trust and confidence in the country’s political process.

## **A Role for Parliamentarians**

Parliaments and parliamentarians have a critical role to play in good governance as elected representatives. Parliamentarians are the 'trustees' of public mandate, given periodically, and the legitimate expectation is that parliamentarians will uphold the national and public interests. One of the essential requirements for a stable political environment is to develop a relationship between parliamentarians and an active civil society. This is indispensable to ensure transparency, accountability and participation. But the ultimate responsibility is with the parliamentarians to expose and denounce corruption, educate the public, and to ensure that civil society has the legal space in which to work effectively.

Numerous reforms will be needed to establish stable and effective regimes in the MENA region. These will require initiatives to build the capacity of regional actors, to a certain extent with the help of international donors. The Parliamentary Network on the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (***the Parliamentary Network***) can serve as a tool for bringing about change by assembling the relevant stakeholders, through collaboration between parliamentarians, governments, civil society, and the major international donors. At the local level, the Parliamentary Network can help empower community leaders, who are able to identify priorities and contribute to the delivery of development programmes.

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