

EuroMediter likes to spread among its reders the the Call of height Arab Women for Democracy Dignity and Equality. This call has been written by Souhayr Belhassen (president of the FIDH, Tunisian), Bochra Belhadj Hmida (lawyer, cofounder and ex-president of the Democratic Women Tunisian Association, Tunisian), Shahinaz Abdel Salam (blogger and activist, Egyptian), Nawal El Saadawi (psychiatrist, writer and feminist, Egyptian), Tahani Rached (filmmaker, Egyptian), Wassila Tamzali (feminist and writer, Algerian), Samar Yazbek (novelist, Syrian), Azza Kamel Maghur (international lawyer and member of the Libyan Council for Human Rights, Libyan). In Europe, this call has been disseminated on the 8th of March 2012 by several Italia, French and Spanish newspapers.

The call

To the attention of all heads of State

We, Arab women engaged in the fight for democracy, dignity and equality, we, who have been at the forefront of the exceptional changes that the Arab world is undergoing,

want to remind the international community that women have the same right as men to benefit from the wind of liberty and dignity that is sweeping through the region.

Women have always been involved in the fight for rights, which vary in importance from one country to another. These rights, however, remain below our aspirations, and as such place women in the region in some of the worst conditions in the world.

Violence, be it in the public or private sphere, continues to be widespread and very few measures are taken to put an end to this scourge.

Family Law, in most Arab countries, is nothing more than legislation that institutes exclusion and discrimination.

Other areas of law such as those that cover nationality, or comprise civil and criminal codes simply reinforce discrimination. Existing legislation violates the most fundamental rights and freedoms of girls and women by instituting practices such as polygamy and marriage for underage females and by creating inequalities in rights in areas such as marriage, divorce, the guardianship of children, and access to property ownership and inheritance.

There are laws that cover honour crimes that allow a male member of a family who kills a girl or woman family member to claim extenuating circumstances.

While the vast majority of Arab countries, with the exception of Sudan and Somalia, have ratified, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which was adopted by the UN in 1979, this has had no real impact on the condition of women.

Today, the Arab world is building democracy with a view to consolidate the rule of law and human rights. We believe that equality cannot be achieved without democracy and that the full enjoyment of democracy is only possible when there is complete equality between men and

women.

For these reasons, we remind States, political parties, and civil society in Arab countries to do the utmost so that the dignity of women and their equality with men are not, yet again, sacrificed in the name of purported priorities.

No democracy can be built to the detriment of half of society. Together we have built our present, and together we will build a better tomorrow.

We demand the following:

- the protection of existing rights, complete and effective equality and the writing of women's rights in constitutions;
- the adoption of legislative and administrative measures to eliminate violence against women;
- the ratification and application of CEDAW, without reservation and in keeping with the spirit of the convention and with all of its concrete consequences.
- the adoption of laws that protect women against social and economic inequalities, and discrimination, especially as relates to the family.
- the adoption of affirmative action measures aimed at ensuring access for women to decision-making positions as well as their participation in politics and civil society associations.
- the denouncement of those who raise their voices to discriminate against women on the basis of retrograde interpretations of religious precepts or who seek to ban women from full and effective participation in a life characterized by dignity and the respect of human rights.

<http://www.euromedrights.org/gender/gender-news/other-gender-press-releases/9270.html>