

Brussels, 13 July 2011

Dear Minister,

The Arab region is witnessing a period of change and quest for a new social contract between the citizen and the state, based on respect of fundamental freedoms, rights, dignity, and rule of law. The peoples' uprisings and revolutions reflect a popular aspiration for change and citizens are calling for a new development paradigm, which re-enforces the right to development and to economic and social justice. The process of democratic transition, to which the EU has committed its support, necessitates a revised approach to economic and social partnerships, aligned with reforms of political systems in which the legitimate role of civil society is recognized and facilitated.

The EU's commitment to these changes requires a re-thinking of priorities and approaches in its cooperation with the countries and their peoples in the region that encompasses all areas of that cooperation. Current approaches, policies and agreements have been established in contexts of questionable legitimacy, which of necessity requires review, so that they can be revalidated, revised or repudiated. In this context we welcome the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy and Action Plans undertaken by the EU. There needs to be full and thorough response to the current dynamic in the region, with recognition of the aspirations that have been expressed in each and every country. While the importance of bringing about a political transition to establish an authentic and accountable system of democracy is central, so too is the need to address the failures of current approaches adopted to address economic and social inequalities.

We urge you to ensure that in this process there is a full engagement with civil society and other stakeholders from the region, both as a clear indication by the EU of its commitment to the process of change that is being demanded, and to the centrality of national ownership by a country's citizens to their development strategies and actions for achieving such strategies.

Collectively we are committed to working towards realising the aspirations expressed by the people of the region. To this end a recent delegation of civil society groups from 7 Arab countries visited Brussels from 27 to 30 June to engage in discussion with senior representatives of EU institutions. During these exchanges the delegation presented the views of civil society on the background and aspirations from people in the region.

The issues presented during the week emphasised the issues set out above, and urged to the EU not only to help ensure that current transitions processes towards democracy remained genuine to the aspirations sought by the people, but that it should be resolute in defending the rights of peaceful avocation by civil society actors for increased democracy and accountability. The delegation also re-

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iterated that achieving regional stability in which sustainable democratic processes can thrive is only possible through establishing peace and a just solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and urged the EU to support the establishment of the Palestinian State next September and to take decisive action to help bring this about.

The Declaration adopted by the delegation at the end of their visit is attached

Sincerely,



Ziad Abdul Samad  
Director  
ANND



Simon Stocker  
Director  
Eurostep



Roberto Bissio  
Coordinator  
Social Watch