

Press Release

For immediate release

Brussels, 1 February 2011

European activists demand robust European response to Egyptian crisis

The uprising in Egypt is a popular demand for democracy, in a context aggravated by mishandling of the financial and economic crisis. While the banks have been bailed out the IMF has further restrained public budgets. In Egypt, aid from Europe has been directed to help keep Mubarak in power with too little support to civil society organisations demanding a more equal and just distribution of resources. Now that impoverished people insist on their rights, this revolution will have far-reaching consequences for the Middle East.

Activists from Europe and neighbouring countries launched the report Social Watch today, which analyses poverty trends in the region. "The IMF policies that have failed in developing countries are now coming home to Europe, prompting a new wave of liberalisation of core government responsibilities, such as airport control" says Roberto Bissio, coordinator of Social Watch, "the unsustainability of governments that do not promote social cohesion for all, is the subline of what the Egyptian crisis is telling us, and which could equally affect the European Union member states."

"This report shows the growing poverty in Europe, which is not high enough on the European agenda", states Simon Stocker, Director of the development network Eurostep, "the Europe 2020 strategy prioritises economic growth over social policy. The emergence of slums in European cities, inhabited by undocumented migrants is evidence that social justice needs to move up on the EU policy agenda."

Fintan Farrell from the European anti-poverty network argues: "It is time the European Union establishes a consistent approach to social protection, both inside and outside the European Union."

According to Genoveva Tisheva from the Gender Research Centre: "EU's foreign policy should focus on poverty eradication, and make sure women equally benefit. Aid should not be used to keep dictators in place. We have experienced ourselves that the people ultimately will demand justice and claim their rights."

Expressing solidarity with the activists in Egypt, Social Watch emphasises that the crisis in Egypt is caused by inequality of distribution. European aid has been insufficiently targeted towards ensuring the inclusion of marginalised people living in poverty. "It is a social revolution" comments Lebanese activist Kinda Mohamadieh spokeswoman from the Arab NGO network for Development which has members across the Arab region, "as civil society organisers our focus is on ensuring the post Mubarak era will have greater accountability mechanisms to the people."

Eurostep is a member of CONCORD

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While the crisis has an internal Egyptian agenda, it will have enormous ramifications to the region. The group is concerned about the lack of a robust response by the European Union.

"This is the end of Mubarak" said Mirjam van Reisen, Professor International Social Responsibility at Tilburg University, "The Berlin Wall has come down in the Southern border of Europe. Northern Sudan, Eritrea, Yemen, Jordan - people in the whole region are taking inspiration. When the Berlin Wall fell, Russia was key. Israel is the nuclear power in the region now. Israel's own survival will now depend on its ability to make peace with its neighbours respecting human rights for all. The EU must make it very clear to Israel that people in the region must be listened to. This will be the opportunity in the Middle East to bring democratically elected voices of the region to the table in a political process for a sustainable negotiated peace. We encourage that EU Member States demand that EU President van Rompuy provides Israel with a clear direction that its responses must be in accordance with international law. People in Egypt are demanding basic democratic rights: basic foods stuffs, basic education, basic health and the right of assembly. It will justify the Palestinian demand for basic rights."

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The Report can be downloaded on www.eurostep.org

Social Watch is an international network of citizens' organizations in the struggle to eradicate poverty and the causes of poverty, to end all forms of discrimination and racism, to ensure an equitable distribution of wealth and the realization of human rights. We are committed to peace, social, economic, environment and gender justice, and we emphasize the right of all people not to be poor.

Social Watch holds governments, the UN system and international organizations accountable for the fulfilment of national, regional and international commitments to eradicate poverty.

Social Watch will achieve its objectives through a comprehensive strategy of advocacy, awareness-building, monitoring, organizational development and networking. Social Watch promotes people-centred sustainable development.

Eurostep is a network of autonomous European non-governmental development organisations working towards peace, justice and equality in a world free of poverty. Its membership, rooted in their own societies, works together to influence Europe's role in the world, particularly in pursuing the eradication of injustice and poverty. *Eurostep* advocates changes in Europe's policies and practice based on the perspectives drawn from direct experiences of an active involvement of its members and their partners in development in over 100 countries across the world.

Eurostep members believe that the eradication of injustice and poverty and a more equitable distribution of resources are essential to achieve peace and stability in the world. These objectives can be achieved through concerted action and political will, particularly by governments, but also by civil society and corporate sector actors in so-called developed and developing countries.