



Friedrich Ebert Stiftung's Human Rights Award 2011

Explanatory Statement for the nomination of Slim Amamou and Khaled Said for this year's Human Rights Award

Political context

The Near/Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA) suffers from marked deficits in democracy and development caused by a high degree of political conflict and authoritarian structures in most of the regimes of the region. An independent *Arab Human Development Report* compiled by intellectuals from various Arab countries identified the key deficits. In addition to having the lowest degree of freedom worldwide measured in terms of civil and political human rights, the region also has the lowest participation of women in politics, society, and the economy and its educational system is one of the worst. The populations in Maghreb and Mashriq countries suffer above all from social injustice, poverty, corruption and police despotism. Some rulers have held the reins of power for decades. Their power relies on a close-knit patronage system and the power of the security forces, expressed for example in the use of torture. Tribalism still prevails in the tradition-minded societies of the region, determining political and economic life on the basis of belonging to male-dominated family clans. Clans control key segments of both the private and public sectors and share responsibility for the high degree of corruption which rates as one of the core problems of the region. Despotic regimes in the MENA region infringe upon a multitude of rights codified in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and UN human rights covenants. These include the right to self-determination, free speech, inclusion and political participation by means of, for instance, free elections, the right to life and physical integrity, protection against discrimination, gender equality as well as a number of economic, social and cultural human rights.

Since 2010 we have seen protests against dictatorship and arbitrary rule almost everywhere in the Arab world. However, toppling the tyrants in Tunisia and Egypt does not mean that the non-transparent and paternalistic systems have automatically been transcended. The current upheavals are motivated not by ideology or religion, but are primarily caused by the hopelessly dire economic and social situation the majority of the people find themselves in. The citizens are trying to force the establishment of political reforms by means of their protests, but they are also fighting for a life in dignity as defined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt have been crucial for the wave of protest movements that have rippled through the region since the fall of both Ben Ali and Mubarak. The situation differs from one country to the next. While in Tunisia a new constitution is already being deliberated heatedly, the scope of reforms as announced by the military government in Egypt is found wanting by its population. The people keep coming together on Tahrir Square to

express their displeasure. In other countries of the region some rulers are trying to stabilise their power through moderate reforms (Morocco, Jordan). In still others, a de-facto civil war rages (Libya) or security forces and the military are deployed to fight the protesters (Syria, Bahrain). The future of democratic change in the MENA region remains far from clear.

The award winners

The regimes in Tunisia and Egypt would not have changed without the efforts of all the people participating in the protests. Hundreds of thousands of people risked their health and lives when they took to the streets, some of them for the first time in their lives. They were not intimidated by the massive violence of the security forces, but instead intensified their protests from day to day. Centuries of dissatisfaction erupted, leading to the ousting of Ben Ali and Mubarak. In addition to demanding social justice and the alleviation of poverty, the people in Tunisia and Egypt primarily desire political reforms and a life in dignity. The protests fundamentally, albeit implicitly, demanded compliance with human rights.

The physical and moral courage Tunisians and Egyptians showed in standing up for freedom, equal rights and a life in dignity was decisive for the protests' success. Despite the danger to life and limb, the people of both countries claimed their rights and defied even the deployment of grievous violence against them. With its Human Rights Award 2011, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung wishes to honour two important players and symbolic figures as representatives of the protest movements and fights for freedom in Tunisia and Egypt.

Ben Ali and Mubarak ruled their countries for decades (Ben Ali starting in 1987, Mubarak in 1981). In Tunisia the protests were ultimately sparked by the self-immolation of a young college graduate on 17 December 2010 out of desperation and lack of prospects. In January 2011 Ben Ali reacted to the demonstrations by announcing that he would not run for presidency in the 2014 elections. This announcement was not sufficient to calm the nation down. On 14 January 2011 Ben Ali felt forced to flee the country into exile in Saudi Arabia. In June 2011 Ben Ali and his wife were sentenced in absentia to 35 years of imprisonment each. The protests in Egypt began on 25 January 2011. All across the country people gathered to call for an end to the Mubarak regime. In a televised address on 10 February 2011 Mubarak said he would never step down, but on 11 February Vice President Omar Suleiman declared that Mubarak had abdicated. In both countries the military's refusal to support the regime significantly increased the pressure on the rulers.

The protest movements in Tunisia and Egypt owe their success to a great extent to the organisation and coordination possibilities of the Internet and new social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Young and media-savvy people played an especially important role during the initial phase of the demonstrations. For several years Internet activists and bloggers had been reporting online about the problems of the people, and the wheelings and dealings of the regime. With commitment and bravery they provided an account of rampant corruption, oppressive poverty, lack of prospects for young people as well as violent suppression by security and police forces - often risking their health and their lives. Two of these individuals who had been chronicling the oppression for years are to receive the FES Human Rights Award as representatives of the young freedom and democracy movement in the region.

Slim Amamou, born in Tunis in 1977, is a computer scientist, blogger, and Internet activist. He is considered one of the chief fighters for free speech in Tunisia. During the final days of Ben Ali's regime he was in prison and has become the symbolic figure of both the

'Generation Facebook' and the democracy movement in Tunisia. After the ousting of Ben Ali he was appointed Secretary of State for Youth and Sports in the Tunisian interim government, but at the same time he made it clear that he was not interested in pursuing a conventional political career. In May 2011 he resigned from his office in order to focus on new projects and to be able to speak and publish freely without being bound by Cabinet discipline. With this step he simultaneously protested against violent police action during demonstrations and against the government's measures curtailing the newly gained Internet freedoms.

Slim Amamou is a partner in an Internet company he himself founded, but at present he is not actively involved in the firm's operations. He is not standing as a candidate for the election to the Constituent Assembly on 23 October, but he supports an initiative for ballots of independent candidates. The initiative aims to have independent public persons in the Constituent Assembly in order to ensure as much pluralism as possible. He continues to be committed to free speech, freedom of expression and free flow of information on the Internet and maintains close ties with the organisation Reporters Without Borders. He has not yet taken a final decision on his return to politics at a later stage.

Khaled Said (born in 1982, † 2010, Egypt) was an Internet activist and blogger. On 6 June 2010 he was apprehended by plain-clothes police officers in an Internet cafe in Alexandria and openly beaten to death in the street. He had uploaded videos onto the Internet showing police officers abusing or intimidating people and dealing drugs. A photo of Said's dead body was published on the Internet. Protests ensued and a Facebook page entitled "We are all Khaled Said" was created. Hundreds of thousands of people were outraged and finally the government conceded that undercover secret police officers were responsible for his death. All these incidents turned Said into a symbolic figure for the Egyptian revolution. The trial of the police officers accused of torturing and killing Khaled Said will become an important litmus test for the reform of politics and judiciary. The verdict expected in September 2011 will have a great symbolic significance for the way injustices are reconciled. Zahraa Kassem, the late Said's sister, will accept the award for him.

This year's FES Human Rights Award for Slim Amamou and Khaled Said – as representatives of all those involved in overthrowing authoritarian regimes – is not only meant to recognise the resistance they put up, but also to encourage the continued fight for democracy and human rights. The FES Human Rights Award pays tribute to the democracy movement in the Arab world and wishes to encourage others to also claim their rights to freedom of expression and information and to call for compliance with human rights.