

The logo for FIDH (Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme) consists of the lowercase letters 'fidh' in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE  
DES LIGUES DES DROITS DE  
L'HOMME



EURO-MEDITERRANEAN  
HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK

CAIRO INSTITUTE  
FOR HUMAN  
RIGHTS STUDIES

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## **Position of the EMHRN, the FIDH and the CIHRS on « international initiatives for reforms in the Arab region »**

A few days before the meeting of the European Union-United States Summit, which will be held on the 26<sup>th</sup> of June in Dublin, the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN), the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) address their recommendations concerning the Euro-American initiatives for reforms in the Arab region.

International initiatives for reforms are particularly important due to the fact that most Arab governments turn a deaf ear to the internal calls for reforms. They even marginalize and suppress reformists and try to get rid of them, while paying due attention to whatever comes from outside the region. This is best exemplified by the fact that due to the international initiatives for reforms, the Summit of the Arab League, which took place in Tunis on May 22, 2004, has for the first time ever tabled the issues of democratic reforms in its agenda. Moreover, the Yemeni and Egyptian governments organized two conferences on reforms in Sanaa between the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> of January 2004 and in Alexandria between the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 14<sup>th</sup> of March 2004.

**The EMHRN, the FIDH and the CIHRS believe that any international initiative aiming at enhancing democratic development and respect for human rights should take into consideration the following elements:**

**First:** To what extent do these initiatives consider the internal requirements of reforms within the Arab world, whose peoples and reformists have been paying high prices for reforms over more than a century through detention, exile, torture, murder, unfair trials, civil wars, mass massacres, poverty and terrorism?

Chances of success for such initiatives will be enhanced if they take into consideration common values and principals and echo internal calls for reforms such as those underscored by the first Civil Forum of NGOs in the Arab world, organised in parallel to the Arab Summit, by the CIHRS, in cooperation with the Association for Defending Rights and Freedoms in Lebanon (ADL) and the Palestinian Human Rights Organization, and in coordination with the EMHRN and the FIDH, and which gathered 52 NGOs from the Arab Region.

We take this opportunity to express our support for the recommendations made in the “Second Independence” document adopted by the Civil Forum, on the requisites for engaging political reforms in the Arab region, and based on the following:

- 1- Human rights values are the fruit of the interaction and communication between civilizations and cultures throughout history, including the Arab and Islamic cultures. They are the product of the struggle by all peoples, including the Arab peoples, against all forms of injustice and oppression, whether internal or external. In this sense, such values belong to humanity at large.
- 2- Respect for human rights is a prime interest for every person, group, people and humanity at large. This is considering that the enjoyment of dignity, freedom and equality by all is a crucial factor in flourishing the human person.
- 3- Peoples of the Arab world – like any other people – have the right to civil representative regimes ensured by the Constitution.
- 4- Such Constitutions should ensure the right to intellectual and political plurality and to establish political parties, syndicates and NGOs. Public rights and freedoms should also be guaranteed.
- 5- Impartiality of the executive authority towards the followers of various religions. The right to freedom of belief and practice of religious rituals should be ensured. Religious institutions should not be allowed to censor the political, intellectual and creative activities.
- 6- Adoption of mechanisms allowing peaceful accession to the political power and accountability before peoples’ representatives.
- 7- Respect for the rights of national, religious, cultural and linguistic groups to citizenship and specific cultures on equal footing.
- 8- Recognition and respect of the rights of women to dignity, legal capacity and full equality between men and women.

We also emphasize the significance of the findings of the UNDP reports on Arab Human Development. Indeed, combating poverty and unemployment, fulfilling the requirements of sustainable development, putting an end to political anarchy, conflicts and civil wars, can only be realized if the relationship between the state and the citizens in the Arab world is re-shaped. This new shape must be based on respect for human rights and the rules of democratic action.

**Second:** The Barcelona process, which was launched in 1995, aimed at making of the Euro-Mediterranean Region an area of peace and stability based on the respect of democracy and human rights. Nevertheless, this process has not, yet, conducted to the expected reforms in the South and East of the Mediterranean Region. One of the main reasons of such a failure is related to the fact that civil society actors were not fully associated to the drawing up and to the implementation of these reforms.

Any initiative for reforms should be based on a real partnership between civil society organizations, the political parties and forces as well as governments in each state. This partnership should lead to the establishment of institutions accountable before the peoples of the Arab world and the international community. Civil society organisations must have a central role in the drawing up of the priority reforms as well as in their implementation. They must also be involved in the process of monitoring the reforms and of identifying benchmarks for their evaluation.

**Third:** Permanent invoking of cultural relativism in the face of internal and external calls for reform is an insult to the Arab and Islamic cultures, as it wrongly introduces them to the world as cultures accepting torture and corruption, infringing the will of the peoples, and refusing to submit their governments and executive agencies to any monitoring or to hold them accountable. The demands of the reformists in the Arab world best meet the cultures of the peoples of the region and are not in contradiction with international standards on human rights. Moreover, most of such demands are already enshrined in the constitutions, legislations and international conventions ratified by the governments of these states. However, there is a lack of political will to let such demands be implemented.

**Fourth:** We consider that any international initiative for reforms should be based on the real and pressing needs of Arab societies. Nevertheless, this is not enough for such initiatives to be welcomed into the Arab world.

The chances for positive interaction between the internal and external initiatives for reforms is, to a great extent, conditional on the evidence that international initiatives come within a more comprehensive vision on the major dilemmas of the region. An environment favorable to the development of the culture of extremism, violence and terrorism and of human rights violations can only provide a durable source of pretexts for the despotic regimes and the anti-reform groups. It also contributes to distracting the political and intellectual elites in the Arab world from their internal agenda, hence, enfeebling the self-momentum towards reforms.

Moreover, sometimes, selectivity in the implementation of international human rights standards and their political manipulation have inflicted great losses on the interests and collective rights of the peoples in the Arab world. Such standards lost their credibility and noble meanings, which lead to grave consequences on internal reforms.

Consequently, our organisations ask all States to respect and fully implement international standards and to efficiently implement the human rights clause (article 2) of the Association agreements between the European union and the countries of the Mediterranean sea.

We also remind that the war against terror should not violate the provisions of international law and the human rights standards. On the contrary, respect for such standards and the struggle against gross injustices in the current international order are the main starting points for undermining terrorism.

**Fifth:** Though we refuse to condition the launching of reforms on the settlement of the Palestinian and the Iraqi questions, we believe that the international initiatives for reforms in the Arab region will lack the suitable momentum unless there is tangible action for a fair settlement of the Palestinian cause. This should be based on the respect of the right of the Palestinian people to an independent state according to the relevant UN resolutions, and an immediate action to effectively authorize the United Nations to fulfill the process of handing the authority over to the Iraqis on a democratic basis.

The timing agreed upon by the international community and the peoples of the region namely, 2005 for declaring an independent Palestinian State and June 30, 2004 to hand the authority over to the Iraqis, must be respected.