



Inter-religious councils can be a support for democratic change after the Arab spring

ILRS, International League of Religious Socialists, held in June 15-17 2012 its Congress in Stockholm. The Congress adopted this Statement on the Arab spring.

Statement on the Arab spring

The Arab spring started in Tunisia, and it triggered a democratic earthquake throughout the Arab world, which has affected the entire Euro-Mediterranean area. Arab dictators and their protectors among the Western elites were threatened and some even terrified when the Arab peoples showed their determination to live in free and democratic countries.

Tunisia and Egypt have already conducted free and democratic elections, and new assemblies have been formed. However, the road to democracy is not straight and many obstacles lay ahead. The formation of democratic parties and spreading of a culture of democracy among men and women, among young and old, and among both the elite and the ordinary human being is a long process. The former elites are reluctant to let go of their economic privileges and their disproportional influence. Substantial political change comes from those who want real change for social justice, those who have something to gain from thorough change. Minor reshuffling of a few powerful individuals is not enough.

Religion can be a source of inspiration for true change and it can foster an urge to treat every human as equal. Religions often include components of charity and of sharing so that no individual may come to harm or starve. Religions may also motivate struggle for social justice and the anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa was led by among many Bishop Desmond Tutu. But we also know that Apartheid was inspired by Christian theologians. We may draw the conclusion that Christians and people of other faiths may use their religions to legitimate both social justice and social inequality.

As religious people we declare our conviction that men and women, and human beings of all creeds and traditions are equal in front of God in a fundamental way, and that no political or religious leaders is entitled to disregard this equality. This equality has political ramifications that will contribute to liberate the human being and promote democracy and social justice.

The ILRS congress in Stockholm June 2012 call upon political leaders and religious leaders in the Arab spring countries to:

- Establish working and confident cooperation between religious leaders of different religious traditions in the Arab spring countries. Such inter-religious councils may provide a confidence that will make religious leaders cooperate and act wisely in case of social crises.
- Initiate regular meetings between religious and political leaders in the Arab spring countries, in order to enhance mutual understanding and respect.
- To commit yourselves to work for the success of the democratic process which should bring about social justice and dignity for each and everyone and constitutions that guarantees these rights.

We urge political leaders in all ILRS member countries to:

- Support processes towards democracy in the Arab spring countries with non-violent means, and to facilitate interaction between civil society – including religions and political organisations - in the ILRS countries and in the Arab spring countries.

ILRS Congress
Stockholm, Sweden 2012-06-17

For more information

Cecilia Dalman Eek
President, ILRS
+46706-554859

Ulf Carmesund
International secretary, Religious Social Democrats of Sweden
+46707-138060

Lars G Linder,
General secretary, Religious Social Democrats of Sweden
+468-545 553 31
lars@trosolidaritet.se