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The “Arab spring”; a lever to move towards abolition in the MENA region

Since November 2011, Together against death penalty (ECPM), joined with the Moroccan organization for Human Rights (OMDH), to launch a project to support the abolitionist cause in the MENA region. A variety of regional abolitionist actors are involved at a distinctive scale in the action. This is mainly the Tunisian, Moroccan, Algerian, Iraqi and Lebanese Coalitions against death penalty, the Leaders Organization of Palestine, Iran Human Rights and the Lebanese international centre for a transitional justice.

The overall objective of the action is to make abolition of the death penalty a priority for the national authorities in 12 target countries: Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Iran, and the Palestinian territories.

Based on the empowerment of civil society since the ‘Arab Spring’, ECPM and its partners wish to support the abolition of the death penalty in the MENA region, incorporating it within the civil society’s claims for political, economic and social rights.

The specific objective is to support the development of a regional network of abolitionist organizations, encouraging the conduct of joint strategies and common actions as well as the elaboration of adequate political and theological advocacy.

Death Penalty in the MENA region

With 139 countries and territories which abolished the death penalty in law or practice,, the abolition of death penalty is a worldwide trend. However, two regions still resist: Asia and the “Arab world”. Among the 22 states represented in the Arab League, only Djibouti abolished capital punishment. In 2010, Algeria was the only country voting in favor of the resolution of the United Nations General Assembly for a worldwide moratorium on the use of the death penalty (RES AGNU 65/206).

The Middle East is the second region in the world, which implemented most executions (21% of the executions). In some countries, where the Sharia influences domestic law, the death penalty seems to appear as almost immutable. Nonetheless, situations differ from one another. And even if executions are current in Iran and Iraq, a trend towards the reduction of executions and the adoption of abolitionist penal reforms are becoming apparent in many Arab countries, such as Morocco, Lebanon, Tunisia and Algeria; considered as abolitionist countries in practice. Remains some country, where political stability is so inconstant that the future is full of uncertainty (in Syria, Libya, and Egypt).

Regarding these facts, ECPM and its partners act to favor first the abolition of the death penalty in the Maghreb region, hoping then for a rebound effect in the entire Middle East region. The upheaval of the

political scene since the “Arab spring”, the emergence and affirmation of citizens and social pro-abolitionist movements seem a strong lever to defend the human rights cause and the abolition of the death penalty in the MENA region.

An ambitious work plan

Planned over 3 years (2011-2014), the work plan is part of an integrated, gradual and flexible approach, based on partnership.

The strategy consists in supporting the emergence, coordination and development of a regional network of abolitionist organizations while incorporating them to the worldwide movement.

Then it is to support this regional network, through advocacy campaigns towards the political and judicial authorities, the joint creation of adapted tools and regional resources (pedagogical projects for students, inquiries in the death rows, numerical tools, etc.), and the coordination of media campaigns towards the public opinion.

Meanwhile, ECPM and its partners will constantly reassess the work plan to changes and evolution of the context in the region.

ECPM Team

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