



EURO-MEDITERRANEAN HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK
RÉSEAU EURO-MÉDITERRANÉEN DES DROITS DE L'HOMME
الشبكة الأوروبية - المتوسطية لحقوق الإنسان

Publication of the EMHRN 2010 Report on Freedom of Association in the Euro-Mediterranean Region: A Threatened Civil Society

Copenhagen – 31 October 2010: At the Occasion of the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network's Freedom of Association Working Group meeting, held in Beirut, Lebanon, last 30-31 October, the EMHRN launched its fourth annual Report assessing the situation of NGOs in the 11 countries of the East and South Mediterranean region¹ and in Europe since the publication of the first EMHRN Report in 2007.

A close examination of recent developments in the Euro-Mediterranean region reveals that freedom of association has experienced setbacks in the past few years and there has been very little positive development worth mentioning.

Since 2007, some countries have amended their laws on NGOs (**Jordan**) or have announced changes (**Egypt, Syria**), while others have recast their legislation in ways that have a direct impact on NGO activities (**Israel, Tunisia**)². The trend observed in the past three years is that new restrictions have been put in place in the name of public order, security and the fight against terrorism. These restrictions have led to arbitrary denials of registration for many organisations, in particular those active in the human rights field (**Libya, Syria, Tunisia**), including in promoting diversity and minorities (**Greece, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, Turkey**). The restrictions have also taken the form of ever-growing interference in NGO activities by the authorities, for example by impeding their right to peaceful assembly (**Algeria, Israel, Egypt**), intervening in the affairs of their boards (**Syria, Tunisia**) or dissolving organisations on arbitrary grounds (**Palestine**). These measures contradict both the spirit and the letter of Article 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

These developments have left human rights activists in a deplorable situation, marked by physical and psychological attacks, smear campaigns and restrictions on the freedom of movement of many activists in a number of countries of the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean. Sentences imposed on NGO activists, in some cases by military tribunals, also provide distressing evidence of the trend towards more restrictive policies observed over the past three years.

On a brighter note, the EMHRN had recently the opportunity to welcome a United Nations Human Rights Council's Resolution, adopted on September 2010, appointing, for a period of three years, a Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association as it believes a clear political commitment is now needed to fully implement the international standards to freedom of association in the MENA region.

Similarly to the previous reports, this fourth Report also includes recommendations aimed at the 11 East and South Mediterranean countries as well as at the institutions of the European Union in the context of their relations with states of the Mediterranean. It finally includes two thematic chapters encompassing

¹ Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Israel, Libya, Lebanon, Morocco, Occupied Palestine Territories, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey

² In the spring of 2010, the Tunisian government adopted a law amending Article 61bis of the Criminal Code, which provides for a lengthy prison sentence for anyone who, directly or indirectly, establishes contacts with agents of a foreign state, institution or organisation with a view to threaten the vital interests and economic security of Tunisia.

the whole Euro-Mediterranean region. This year, the subjects are the funding of associations and the right of non-nationals to form associations.

The new EMHRN Report is available on the EMHRN website at:

http://en.euromedrights.org/index.php/publications/emhrn_publications/68/4758.html