

Some Human Rights Issues in the
Euro-Mediterranean Region
Euro-med Seminar, Malta, October 2009

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4 key issues

- Occupation and military intervention
- The role of the state re human rights
- Freedom of association and freedom of expression
- Persistent poverty
- *Other issues = environment, health, women's rights, population, migrants, refugees etc., water, identity and diversity etc.*

Occupation and military intervention

- In Iraq (since 2003), the Occupied Palestinian Territories (since 1967) and in Somalia (since 2006), people's basic right to self-determination has been forcefully denied
- All three situations violate international law
- Military intervention in all three cases has deepened existing class, group, sectarian and tribal divisions, has aggravated tensions and has led to conflicts within conflicts
- Casualties – Iraq (March 2003 – June 2006), estimates vary from high of 600,000 plus to a low of 47,668: OPT (2000 to 2008), 4,908 Palestinian deaths, 1,062 Israeli deaths, 32% children plus some 32,000 plus serious injuries; Somalia (no reliable figures, est. of 10,000 plus
- Other results – *arbitrary detention, abuse, economic decline, environmental damage, infrastructure destruction, brain drain, health, education and nutrition impacts etc.*

The role of the state re human rights

- Legitimacy of the 'rule of law', the acceptability of the state to its own citizens, compliance with accepted international treaties and how the state 'domesticates' these – massive gap between theory and practice
- Factors such as weak institutional curbs on state power; a fragile and fragmented civil society; dysfunctional elected assemblies (nationally and locally) and proportionately powerful security apparatuses often *'combine to turn the state into a menace to human security, rather than its chief supporter'*
- What Arab constitutions grant, Arab laws take away

'The relationship of the Arab state to human rights is inherently problematic in that human rights in their legal sense can be conceived of only in confrontation with the state. This is what makes the issue complex: how can the state, as the totality of executive, legislative and judicial institutions accountable for human rights violations, at the same time uphold these rights?'

RADWAN ZIYADEH

Syrian human rights activist

and founder of the Damascus Centre for Human Rights Studies

Freedom of association and expression

- Across the Arab region, six countries - Kuwait, Libya, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, prohibit in principle the formation of political parties. Bahrain is the only one of the six Gulf states which affords this freedom
- With one exception, all Arab states support the right to form civil associations BUT there are systematic and widespread restrictions and regulations that hinder this right (boards, funding, activities, membership etc.)
- Extraordinarily long periods of 'emergency' (Syria 1963, Egypt 1981, Algeria 1992 etc.)
- Independence of the judiciary remains problematic as does freedom of the press
- *'a series of unfreedoms'* – a phrase often used to describe the lives of too many citizens

Persistent poverty

- Two concepts – **Income poverty** (real per capita consumption of goods and services) and **human poverty** (income + education, health and political freedom)
- 2005, 20.3% of population living below \$2 per day level = 34.6 million living in extreme poverty (but could be 65 million) – worst in Yemen, Sudan and Mauritania
- Inequality in wealth on the increase
- This translates into undernutrition (one of only two regions (+SSAf) where number of undernourished has increased over last two decades from 19.8 to 25.5 million (increases in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Lebanon and Yemen) – obesity also on the rise!
- Impact of market deregulation on food security