

Arabic Spring: causes and impact

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I thank the Fundación Promoción Social de la Cultura and the Cooperación Española for organizing this conference on the theme of Arab Spring, this popular revolution which is still sweeping over the Middle East and North Africa. Such insight is crucial for those who plan for any development in this area. It is not possible to make programs and strategies of development in these Middle Eastern countries without analyzing their present political situation, in order to see the real needs of these countries.

The Arab Spring is a term for the revolutionary wave of demonstrations and protests (both non-violent and violent) and civil wars in the Arab world that began on December 2010 in Tunisia then continued in Egypt, Libya, Yemen Syria, Bahrain, Soudan, with a beginning in Jordan. We can consider the two Palestinian uprisings as the Palestinian search for a spring.

The term "Arab Spring" is an allusion to the Prague Spring in 1968. Some observers have drawn comparisons between the Arab Spring movements and the Revolutions of 1989 (also known as the "Autumn of the Nations") that swept through Eastern Europe and the Second World, in terms of their importance and significance. Others, however, have pointed out that there are major differences between the movements, such as the organizational role of internet technology in the Arab revolutions. In fact, nine out of ten Egyptians and Tunisians answered to a poll that they used *Facebook* to organize protests and spread awareness. Furthermore, 28% of Egyptians and 29% of Tunisians asserted that blogging *Facebook* greatly hindered and/or disrupted communication.

Due to the subsequent electoral success of Islamist parties in many Arab countries, the events have also come to be known as the "Islamist Spring"

Causes:

The Arab Spring is widely believed to have been instigated by

- Dissatisfaction with the rule of local governments. A major slogan of the demonstrators in the Arab world has been *Ash-sha`b yurid isqat an-nizam* ("the people want to bring down the regime").
- The wide gaps in income levels between classes.
- Dictatorship or absolute monarchy.
- Human rights violations.
- Political corruption.
- Economic decline, unemployment, extreme poverty.
- A large percentage of educated but dissatisfied youth within the population.

In recent decades rising living standards and literacy rates, as well as the increased availability of higher education, have resulted in an improved Human Development in the affected countries. The tension between rising aspirations and a lack of government reform may have been a contributing factor in all of the protests. A university professor referred to this upheaval as youth quake.

These young were looking for: Democracy, Free elections, Human rights, Employment, Regime change, Islamism (by some) and Secularism (by others).

Methods:

Civil disobedience, Civil resistance, Defection from the army, Demonstrations, Insurgency, Internet activism, Protest camps, Revolution, Sit-ins, Strike actions and riots.

We have to mention the Interference of foreign countries as in the case of Libya, Iraq and Syria. This complicated the situation, since the foreign countries have their own interest and not the apparently declared targets such as democracy. This display of contradictory interests is obvious in Syria where democracy is not really the real concern from the interference of foreigner countries, some of them which lack democracy in their own land. The injection of weapons in these countries is complicating the situation.

Impact:

Victims, in Iraq and Syria alone, rose up to almost half million. Millions are displaced and refugees, suffering hunger, starvation....

We have to recognize that countries, touched by this spring such as (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Yemen) have not made a real breakthrough towards democracy and towards the constitution of postmodern secular states. The unique exception is Egypt which can be a model spring. After a good start, the revolution was appropriated by the Moslem brothers who took the power but failed into democratizing the country and reforming the constitution according to democratic principles. The army interfered to save the country from a tremendous civil war. The reformation of the constitution was well done. The Coptic minority was satisfied and many consider Al Sissi as a super-hero.

The Christians and the Intifada:

Except in Egypt, Palestine and very timidly in Syria, Christians were afraid to participate in the demonstrations. In some way there were defenseless and paid a high price. Half of the Christian of Iraq left the country. The same happened in Syria.

Before jumping to the conclusion, I have to focus on a big mistake, committed in all these revolutions:

- Democracy was planned to be introduced by force like in Iraq and Syria. Foreign countries believed naively that after 5 weeks of fighting, the country will change the regime and enjoy democracy.
- Democracy does not consist in changing a dictator by another.
- Democracy is a mindset, a number of values that should become part of the society and enter in its subconscious. The Arab countries were not prepared to a sudden leap. Mubarak was changed into Morsi: two names for the same reality.

Conclusion:

- -We need to make a real change through education. We need to train the trainers and introduce courses on democracy and respect of the others. More than self-generating projects (although needed), we need to invest in culture, intercultural dialogue, and interreligious dialogue. In the Arab countries, minorities are suffering. But their situation in Jordan and Palestine are the

best in the Arab World. It is not strange. The level of education in these countries is one of the highest in the Arab world.

- -We need to make the majority accept the minority as equal in rights and duties and not as second class citizens. We need to integrate minorities into the majority without any complex of inferiority. We need as well to give an equal status to women. In fact, a society which does not respect women and minorities have no potential to a true development since more than half of the society will then be handicapped.
- To introduce democracy into a country without preparation is like purchasing furniture before building the house, or buying a bicycle for a child who does not walk or giving a gun to a person without training him how to use it.
- It is important to support moderate Moslems. In fact Moslems belong to different trends. There is a difference between the Islam of Arafat, Salam Fayyad and Rami Al Hamdallah from one side, and Hamas, the Moslem brothers, Jabhat El Nusra and Al Qaeda or Daesh from another.

I conclude here, knowing that my oversight is lacking because it is very general. But I am sure that it is only a starting point in the conference.