



REPORT ON FACT-FINDING MISSION IN EGYPT

7TH MARCH 2011 – 11TH MARCH 2011

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Introduction

Between 7th and 11th March in 2011, the London secretariat of the Universal Justice Network (UJN) sent a delegation to Egypt on a fact-finding mission during the ‘Islamic awakening’. The delegation included IHRC chair and representative of the London secretariat of UJN Massoud Shadjareh, IHRC campaigns officer Salma Ashraf, member of UJN and elected Imam of the Islamic Centre of Washington Mohamed al-Asi, and representative of the Malaysian secretariat of the UJN Mohideen Abdulkader.

The purpose of this mission was to gauge public opinion during one of the most turbulent periods in modern Egypt’s history.

The following report details their findings based on interactions with political parties, civil-society groups, movements and individuals that it came across. It offers an insight into the ideologies and demands of the people now paving the way to a new Egypt.

The report will also detail some of the crimes perpetrated by the Mubarak regime against the Egyptian people.



Doctors' Syndicate of the Freedoms Committee

Dr Abdel Fattah Reizk is an Egyptian doctor, and member of the Doctors' Syndicate – itself a part of the Freedoms Committee. He is also a member of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Doctors' Syndicate take on many humanitarian responsibilities inside and outside of the country. Dr Abdel Fattah Reizk and 120 other doctors of varied specialisations had travelled to Libya, and were able to carry out over 300 medical procedures in the country.

Dr Reizk was also one of the candidates for the elections of the People's Assembly in November 2010 and remains convinced that the outcomes of that election were based on fraud. Dr Reizk's remark that "You get the votes and NDP members win" reflects an outlook shared by all prospective independent candidates who choose to stand for election against National Democratic Party candidates.

One of the chief priorities for the Doctors' Syndicate has been to send daily medical and food supplies, along with small medical teams, to the eastern borders of the country with Gaza.

The Doctors' Syndicate have also set up a committee tasked with bringing to justice doctors who were complicit in the Egyptian regime's brutality by falsely diagnosing the causes of injuries and fatalities during the protests.

On 7th March, the Doctors' Syndicate travelled to Libya, where they encountered thousands of refugees from countries as diverse as Bangladesh and Somalia.

The Chairman of the National Transitional Council Mostafa Abdel Jaleel welcomed in person all of those who travelled with the Doctors' Syndicate from Egypt.



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Dr Reizk and the Doctors' Syndicate wish to bring the Mubarak regime before the International Criminal Court.

He held reservations about the prospect of the Muslim Brotherhood being incorporated in the political process, due to the intense biases against them in the media both inside and outside of Egypt. This he said is rooted in both the historical marginalisation of the group by successive NDP governments through propaganda, as well as Washington's fear that Egypt may embrace its Islamic identity as a potential leader of the Arab world.

The Doctors' Syndicate regard a number of decisions taken by the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) as steps in the right direction. These include removing President Hosni Mubarak from power and ceasing to supply Israel with gas. Nevertheless, Dr Reizk fears that the revolution will be exploited by the military, who would prefer a coup rather than a fully fledged revolution – akin to that which was led by the Free Officers Movement in 1952. He relates that the Muslim Brotherhood are particularly sensitive to this possibility.

“Dr Reizk is concerned about the negative coverage that the Muslim Brotherhood has received in the Egyptian media during the uprising, where the group's Islamic MP Farid identity was frequently attributed to Iran. “It is absurd”, recounted Reizk, “my friend and former Muslim Brotherhood Ismail was filmed walking down the street with Muslim Brotherhood MP Ashraf Badr Eldin by Egyptian state TV, and accused of being accompanied by an Iranian agent!”.

The delegation recommended that the Muslim Brotherhood launch an international television channel in order to combat the negative image it receives on state sponsored TV stations.



Hisham Mubarak Law Centre (HMLC)

Ahmed Seif El-Islam Hamad is the founder of the Hisham Mubarak Law Centre (HMLC). Based in Cairo and Aswan, HMLC works in the field of human rights through litigation, campaigns, and legal research. Its work in providing support for torture victims and fighting against arbitrary arrest in Egypt is widely regarded as exemplary. HMLC began their work during the general strike of 2008 in El-Mahalla El-Kubra. Between the 2nd and 5th February, at least 35 of its legal professionals were arrested by the police.

HMLC have formed a committee which encompasses 30 human rights organisation, and have selected 9 representatives to investigate the widespread abuses committed by security forces in Tahrir Square.

Ahmed Hamad told the delegates that he and his group were already in the process of bringing forth formal claims of human rights abuses to the country's prosecutor general. He stressed that securing the independence of the media and judiciary are amongst the top priorities for activists like himself.



Labour Party & Kefaya Movement

Dr Magdy Hussein is Head of the Egyptian Labour Party and co-ordinator in Kefaya Movement. He is the son of Ahmed Hussein, the founder of the Young Egypt Movement. The Labour Party was established in 1978 by Ibrahim Shokry.

Originally a Socialist movement, it has in recent years embraced a more Islamic political philosophy in order to attain its goal of social justice in the context of Muslim Egypt. Up until being forbidden to engage in political activism by the Mubarak regime, the Labour Party had cooperated extensively with the Muslim Brotherhood. Their strategy to oppose the government has since then been based on the Islamic concept of bringing political change through civil disobedience.

Dr Magdy Hussein was sentenced to two years imprisonment in 2009 after crossing into Gaza through a tunnel from Egypt. He was released on 29th January 2011.

The Egyptian army have since the uprisings met with all of the major political parties, with the exception of the Labour Party.

The Labour Party are concerned that the more extreme-secular parties in the countries are attempting to marginalise the more Islamic influenced movements that have taken part in the struggle against Mubarak.



Al-Ghad Liberal Party

Ayman Nour is Head of Al-Ghad Liberal Party, and is a former presidential candidate. He was imprisoned in 2005 during the course of his electoral campaign, and was released in 2009 on grounds of his poor health. “Justice”, he said, “is completely absent from Egypt”.

He expressed his appreciation of the fact that there exists Islamic human rights organisations like IHRC and Crescent International. He stressed the importance of exhibiting an Islamic identity, and always linking it to our rights, interests and political engagement. “Challenging the discourses of human rights that are an international currency is the duty of every Muslim, because we need to let others know that Islam and Human Rights are one and the same”.

Ayman Nour urged NGOs and INGOs to pay greater attention to the plight of ordinary Egyptians, and for more work to be done to ensure that the structural and institutional inequalities that allow for human rights abuses to occur be immediately publicised so that they can be held to account. He also expressed his wish that such NGOs and INGOs around today would coordinate more with each other. He recognised two chief reasons for the dreadful human rights situation in Egypt: corruption of officials, and foreign aid without conditionality.



Al-Ghad identify three threats to the future of Egypt in light of the uprisings:

- Democracy being undermined by states that do not wish for the Egyptian government to represent the will of its people, such as Israel and Saudi Arabia.
- The assertiveness of SCAF in filling the political vacuum left by Mubarak. Al-Ghad view SCAF as a vital component to the regime's repressive rule over its citizens for the past six decades. Whilst they accept the necessity for the army to maintain stability, they should always be subject to the democratic process. This is not the case with SCAF, they argue.
- The third is poverty, which Al-Ghad attempt to provide solutions for.

Ayman Nour concluded with the remarks that, "we hope to cooperate with other groups, and garner support from the people for our programmes which we hope will solve Egypt's problems and bring us forward".

April 6 Youth Movement

Amr Ali, Mohamed Adel and Marwa Nasser are members of the April 6 Youth Movement. Being a 'catch-all' group, the April 6 Youth Movement are committed to overthrowing the regime without aligning themselves with one particular ideology. Amr related to the delegation that they prefer to engage with the young Egyptian population through Facebook, Twitter, and social gatherings rather than manifestos. "We use the language of the youth", he said. This includes a recent campaign on Facebook for Khaled Saeed, a young man that was tortured to death in 2010. They also cooperate with the Freedom and Justice party – a sub-branch of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The April 6 Youth Movement intend to start more training centres and workshops that will educate the Egyptian people about their political and civil rights. They wish to ingrain in the youth the idea that the tyranny of past generations should not be taken as given, and that it is a duty of theirs to eradicate it completely.

They also wish to increase the awareness of the Egyptian people – and across the Arab world – about their economic rights and instil in them the concept of social justice. It is a priority of theirs to eradicate the inequalities endemic to all Egyptian state institutions.

Amr, Mohamed and Marwa agreed with UJN representatives that there should be greater cooperation between NGOs, political movements and parties so that they achieve their common goals. They were determined to learn from the lessons of Gamal Abdel Nasser, the Islamic Revolution of Iran, and Turkey; hoping to emulate their successes, and avoid their mistakes. The young men and women were eager to stress to the delegation that they did not want Egypt to merely apply the Western liberal model of democracy to Egypt.

They requested that UJN help the April 6 Youth Movement learn new ways of engaging with the people and the police in order to achieve their goals. UJN delegates proposed that they would assist the group by dedicating their efforts to encouraging young Egyptians to become more politically expressive, and to publicise this work in order for it to be closely monitored by the international community.

Sawaseya Centre for Human Rights (SCHR)

Abdel Monem Abdel Maqsood is a senior lawyer for the Muslim Brotherhood's defence team, and is part of the Sawaseya Centre for Human Rights (SCHR). Their members were frequently harassed by the police and security services.

They primarily focus on two objectives:

- To prosecute those that killed and maimed protesters and other Egyptian civilians on 25th January.
- Demanding that the Egyptian Attorney General investigates the incidents that took place in Tahrir Square.

Abdel Maqsood articulated to the delegates how members of the Muslim Brotherhood are being tried in military courts under the Emergency Law. SCHR have submitted a request for the release of one such member, Dr Osama Soliman, who was sentenced to five years imprisonment. Political prisoners in Egypt with ties to Islamic groups frequently face much more severe treatment in prisons than other inmates, and are often targeted for torture.

SCHR are attempting to secure the immediate dropping of all charges against members of the Muslim Brotherhood since 1995. They are also working on reversing the charges against all those Egyptians charged in absentia and exile. Abdel Maqsood and the SCHR requested that other Islamic organisations across the world cooperate with each other so that they may secure the release of Muslim political prisoners.

UJN and SCHR agreed to collaborate on a report that SCHR are compiling that will focus on many of the human rights violations in the country.



Muslim Brotherhood

Khairat al-Shater is the Deputy Chairman of the Muslim Brotherhood, and was an IHRC Prisoner of Faith until his release. He has been at the forefront of the group's efforts to deal with the country's socio-economic problems in the past decades. These include:

- Building hospitals and providing medical care.
- Building schools and providing education.
- Distributing food to the poor.
- Promoting communal and national solidarity via programmes aimed at fostering social cohesion.

Khairat al-Shater recommended that the IHRC should have a permanent representative in Egypt, and that there should at least always be extensive cooperation between Egyptian civil society and government work of IHRC helped secure the release of himself and other political prisoners.

UJN delegation members meeting with Muslim Brotherhood deputy chairman Khairat al-Shater (second from right).





Dr Abdallah Omar Abdulrahman

Dr Abdallah Omar Abdulrahman is the eldest son of Sheikh Omar Abdulrahman, a prominent religious scholar who been incarcerated in the United States since 1995 on charges that are widely seen as being politically motivated.

Dr Abdulrahman has encountered difficulties in campaigning for the release of his father due to restrictions on travel and communication imposed by the Egyptian and US governments. He and his family have been kept in the dark regarding the deteriorating health of his father, and even the Sheikh's lawyer Ramsey Clark is restricted in the information that he is allowed to relay to them.

Massoud Shadjareh suggested that the case of Sheikh Abdulrahman be brought up in the UNHCHR Universal Periodic Review on the United States.

He also stated that members of the Egyptian government are enjoined the right to visit its prisoners that are imprisoned abroad, and that IHRC would increase its efforts to lobby the Egyptian government to put pressure on the US so that he is released.

Massoud Shadjareh said that IHRC would raise this issue with other governments and authorities, and also meet with Mr Clark. Dr Abdulrahman told IHRC that his father follows the work of IHRC as closely as he can, and asks in his telephone conversations about the work being done for him. He wishes to join IHRC when he is released.



UJN delegates meet with Dr Abdallah Omar Abdulrahman (right of centre)

Coalition of the Youth of the Revolution (CYR)

Moaz Abdel Kareem is a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as the Coalition of the Youth of the Revolution (CYR). The coalition had been involved in coordinating many protests before and after the uprisings. It encompasses activists from groups including:

- Kefaya.
- April 6 Youth Movement.
- Muslim Brotherhood.
- The National Association for Change (NAC).

Moaz Kareem told the UJN delegation that the Muslim Brotherhood executive bureau had stated that whilst the group would not formally take part in the protests, they would not prevent their members and supporters from participating. He emphasised the important role of the youth in protecting the Christian minorities during the protests, who formed human shields to protect churches from being damaged. The regime has wrongly attempted to attribute violence against Christians to Muslim activists, which explains their mass arrest of over 450 Salafis, who were tortured over a period of 48 hours before some of them were released. One of those arrested, Sayed Bilal, was tortured to death.

CYR helped to organise the protests on 20th January through Facebook and other social networking tools. They are actively pursuing the writing of a new constitution, and the establishment of popular sovereignty.

“Front of the Defense of Demonstrators (DFF)”

UJN delegates were present at a conference held by the Front of the Defense of Demonstrators (DFF) in collaboration with the Freedoms Committee of the Journalists’ Syndicate. This conference involved discussions and plans centred upon implementing better strategies of bringing the regime to account for its crimes during the demonstrations.

The DFF documented the names of 688 people killed during 25th January uprisings, which was much higher than the official numbers given by the regime. The DFF continues to document and investigate all of these cases.

At this conference, the head of the HMLC Ahmed Saif al-Islam called for a comprehensive eradication of all elements of the all old regime in state institutions.

Following this conference, delegates met with two people involved in cases that DFF are working on.

- The first of these was Ghada Radwan, the wife of Fagaj Hamad Mousa – a Palestinian. Fagaj was arrested immediately after concluding his Fajr (dawn) prayers. He was accused of collecting donations for Gaza during the 2009 war. Fagaj was stripped naked, beaten and tortured by electrocution.

Despite the court ordering for Fagaj’s release, the Minister of Interior appealed against its decision. The court was subsequently forced to hold another hearing. He was released on Thursday 17th March, but the campaign to investigate the circumstances of his incarceration continues.

- The second was Tasneem Sulayman, the wife of Mohamed Radwan Hammad. Mohamed was accused with his brother Farag of belonging to the Zaytoun Cell, which is accused of killing four Christians. Her husband is charged with entering Palestine through a tunnel under the Egyptian border, and having solicited donations for Palestinian resistance movements.



Conclusions

The groups and individuals that the UJN delegations conducted interviews with shared a non-compromising attitude towards the regime of President Hosni Mubarak, and are suspicious of the power wielded by the military in the aftermath of his ousting.

What is remarkable about the character of many of these movements is that they are comprised of predominantly young Egyptians that acknowledge Islam as one of the main ideological currents propelling the upheaval.

There is indeed a plurality of different ideologies and approaches towards the uprising in Egypt. With the exception of some secularist and leftist oriented parties, almost all major political movements the legitimacy of Islamic inspired political groups to take part in the making of a new Egypt. In this regard, it should also be noted that the Muslim Brotherhood are considered by Egyptians as an ideological framework and mobilising force, rather than just a political party.

All those that UJN delegates spoke with demonstrated an acute awareness of the fact that the Egyptian uprising was taking place within a broader movement for Islam, freedom, justice and equality across the Muslim world. UJN recognised an urgent need for Muslim civil society groups and activists worldwide to join those in Egypt in their struggle.



