



Initiated by



Federal Foreign Office



The right to be political

Conference paper by Saeed Karajah

As we witness dramatic transitions in Arab countries, through reform, revolts, and even war in a time of great instability, it is prudent to look at the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in all of their forms (e.g. professional unions, labour unions, charitable societies, religious organisations, free clubs, and cultural and technical associations) in leading the efforts necessary to maintain and grow civil societies that promote and protect individual rights and freedoms. After the Arab Spring and the subsequent changes in power, restrictions on CSOs have increased, and their role as an intermediary between the individual and the state has been diminished, creating a void.

An open civil society should have laws that protect the fundamental rights of individuals to express their views freely and organize their efforts in pursuit of common objectives. Such protections should translate into a legal framework that supports the existence of CSOs by facilitating the process of forming them as a legal entity and repeals all limitations on the objectives of CSOs so as to allow all activities – including political participation, since in most Arab countries they are prohibited from having any political objectives which limits their purposes to pursuing charity work or capacity building in the fields of education, awareness, and health.

It is also necessary to enhance legal and regulatory provisions that establish good governance and transparency in CSOs in order to increase their credibility with the community and the government and strengthen their support. In addition to an independent judicial system which believes in the role of civil society, legal reform will create a welcoming environment with a legal framework that provides stability, security, and freedom from the arbitrary intrusions of governments. However, it has been proven that this is not enough to engage CSOs politically. It is therefore essential to emphasise the role of CSOs in the reform process, as they act as a catalyst for individuals to practice active citizenship and participate in public life.

Moreover, the crystallisation of the concept that the individual has a natural, inalienable, and constitutional right to participate in political decision-making through freedom of speech and assembly will establish CSOs as an effective tool to practice this right and a platform from which change can be initiated. The reform necessary to entrench this concept in society and empower individuals and their assemblies needs to be implemented in education, through curriculum reform, and by encouraging the engagement of youth in political life once restrictions preventing college and educational institutions from having political objectives are removed.

Supported by



Friedrich Naumann
STIFTUNG FÜR DIE FREIHEIT



Hanns
Seidel
Stiftung



HEINRICH
BÖLL
STIFTUNG



Konrad
Adenauer
Stiftung

