



## SOCIAL WATCH E-NEWSLETTER

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### Tunis: The Jasmine Revolution rocks



*By Roberto Bissio\**

President Ben Ali left Tunis last January 14, fleeing from the citizen revolt that paralyzed the country during four weeks. The destiny of the "Jasmine Revolution" is still uncertain, but Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi pledged on January 17 to free political prisoners and lift restrictions on the leading human rights group, the Tunisian League for the Defence of Human Rights, which is the focal point of Social Watch in Tunisia.

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### "Breaking the Hegemony of Knowledge"

The release of the Social Watch Report 2010 in Arabic, hosted by the Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) within its Regional Forum on Economic and Social Rights this month, was a very appropriate scenario to discuss about the impact of civil society actions on the governments' work and to get an update of the evolving political situation. As a participant said during the launch, it said a lot about the importance of "breaking the hegemony of knowledge" held by the traditional powers.

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### Second European Social Watch Report

The second European Social Watch Report will be publicly launched next February 1 at the European Parliament in Brussels. "Time for Action: Responding to Poverty, Social Exclusion and Inequality in Europe and Beyond" is the title of the report and that response by civil society will be discussed, the day before, by watchers from all over the continent. The strategizing will also address the involvement of European Social Watch Coalitions at regional and international levels and the preparations for the Social Watch General Assembly 2011, scheduled for July in the Philippines.

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### **Czech Version of the Social Watch Report 2010**

The launch of the Czech version of the Social Watch Report 2010 will take place on Wednesday 26th January 2011, from 16:30 in café Trojka, Dominikanska Street 9, Brno.

The Report will be presented by Jiri Silny, Tomas Tozicka, Zuzana Uhde and Milan Stefanec, all of them members of the Czech Social Watch Coalition

The document will be available also at the Coalition website: [www.socialwatch.cz](http://www.socialwatch.cz)

### Double Discrimination in Canada

The Government of Canada says that Bill C-3 will newly grant status to 45,000 Aboriginal women and their descendants. However, estimates are that there are another 200,000 that will still be left out. Indian and feminist activist Sharon McIvor, tired to fight against this discrimination in Canadian courts, will appeal to the United Nations Human Rights Committee.

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### In Search of Buen Vivir

Jens Martens, Director of Global Policy Forum Europe, explains "the Buen Vivir approach" to development: "This is not so much a development model but a holistic life philosophy based on the view of indigenous peoples in the Andes region. It pursues the goal of material, social and spiritual well-being among all members of a society, but not at the cost of the other members and the natural resources." This and other proposed alternatives to the current development model were discussed during the first meeting of the civil society the Reflection Group on sustainable development last January 13-14 in Berlin.

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### The Jasmine Revolution

*By Roberto Bissio\**

"It's a victory of us all!" comments with joy Souahyr Belhassen, president of the International League for Human Rights. The Tunisian chapter of her organization, which is also the local focal point of Social Watch, has just been legalized by the interim government of Mohamed Ghannouchi. An amnesty law is imminent and three days of mourning have been declared to honour the at least five dozen people that died during the strikes and street protests of the last four weeks.

Not long ago the Ben Ali administration seemed so solid that in March 2008 the United States ambassador Robert Godec reported to the Bush administration that the President of Tunisia was a "moderate" who was offering

"unqualified support" in the fight against terrorism. However in July 2009, in one of his last communiqués from Tunisia, Godec told Hillary Clinton that the regime ought to be a close ally, "but this is not the case". The outgoing ambassador added that "President Ben Ali is getting old, his regime is paralyzed and there is no clear successor. The Tunisian people are frustrated at their lack of political freedom and furious at the corruption in the President's family, high unemployment and sharp inequalities between different regions".

The secret State Department cables that Wikileaks has made public are adding fuel to the flames of frustration. A website called "tunileaks" has been set up to disseminate secret reports that deal with Tunisia, and these are grouped in four categories: "Security", "Politics", "Guantanamo" (Ben Ali offered to take some of the detainees) and "family affairs", which is the spiciest section as it contains detailed information about the President's entourage.

One of these cables, "What's yours is mine", explains how in 2006 two of the President's nephews took a yacht belonging to a French businessman. The cables describe the "quasi mafia" that governed the country and provide details on how the governing family manoeuvred to seize control of Tunisia's most profitable bank, and how Ben Ali himself ended up with half the shares in a private university.

In July 2009, Godec dined with Mohamed Sakher el-Materi, President Ben Ali's son-in-law, at his summer mansion at Hammamet, which is decorated with Roman columns and frescoes. The ambassador lists some of the things on the menu that night, including ice cream that was brought in specially from Saint-Tropez on the French Riviera. He also gives the name of one of his host's pets, a tiger that consumes four chickens a day, and he says this reminds him of the lion that Uday Hussein, Saddam's son, kept as a pet.

The change of regime in Iraq was brought about by armed intervention and was very costly in terms of human life and material damage, but in Tunisia the change was the result of a generalised people's rising that was led by the students, the unions and the middle class.

In 2005 the Tunisian government hosted the World Summit on the Information Society, which dealt with the question of how the Internet can contribute to development, but this same government has a long record of blocking opposition web sites and sending students to jail for publishing their opinions in blogs. However, they were unable to prevent the diffusion the Wikileaks revelations, which were passed by word of mouth and e-mail to facebook. Phone messaging played a part in how the street demonstrations were organized. In a country where the opposition parties had organizational capabilities severely constrained by repression, the unions and the NGOs played a key role. The Jasmine revolution was televised to all the neighbouring live and it has infused with new hope a region that seemed strangled to inaction in the dilemma between authoritarians and fundamentalists.

*\* Coordinator of Social Watch.*

### [The Social Watch Report 2010 Released in Arabic](#)

The Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) hosted the release of the Social Watch Report 2010 in Arabic within the Regional Forum it had organized on Economic and Social Rights on the 6th and 7th of January 2011 in Beirut, in light of the preparations for the second Arab Economic and Social Development Summit 2011 to be held in Egypt.

The report was presented by ANND Executive Director Mr. Ziad Abel Samad, co-chair of the Social Watch Coordinating Committee Ms. Tanya Dawkins, and member of the Coordinating Committee of the Social Watch and of ANND as well as member of the PNGO Network Steering Committee Dr. Allam Jarrar, in the presence of more than forty researchers, experts and representatives of civil society organizations from different Arab countries.

The Regional Forum on Economic and Social Rights in Light of the Global Crisis so NGOs from across the Middle East and North Africa try to formulate recommendations that Arab governments can adopt as a way of sustaining development following the world financial meltdown of 2008.

The conference ruminated on the role civil society organizations could play in influencing respective policymakers in Arab countries.

Kinda Mohamadieh, ANND. programs director, said that NGOs were making an impact with governments in the region, in spite of inherent reluctance to reform from some administrations.

"We see that Arab governments have taken a political decision to create a regional process for progressing economic and social reforms in the region," she told The Daily Star.

"We [as NGOs] are responsible for engaging with this process and to put together mechanisms of holding governments accountable to the decisions they are taking.

"We first need to struggle for our space of existence and then voice our concerns. All these decisions on development are a reflection of power politics defined by the roles of governments and institutions."

The latest U.N. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (Escwa) report on the Arab world made for grim reading in terms of social and economic equality in a region that contains the majority of the world's known oil reserves – the report estimated that poverty had increased since 2005 due to inflated food and fuel prices.

Magdy Abdel-Hamid, from the Egyptian Association for Civic Engagement, said that the region suffered from poor resource management.

"The Arab world enjoys natural and human resources in plenty, but the problem lies in the lack of political structure

and proper management of these resources," he said.

Hamid urged governments "address food shortages and formulate policies that address food security."

Lebanon demonstrated the need for more robust social reform and wealth redistribution organized by governments, according to Ziad Abdel-Samad, Executive Director of ANND.

"Redistribution is a redistribution of growth, so if Lebanon achieved relatively good levels of growth over the last few years it does not mean that the revenue from the growth was handed out in society," he said.

Abdel-Samad argued that as long as virtually all of Lebanon's administrative apparatus was centered in Beirut, crushing poverty would continue to affect distant areas. "You have to restructure the Lebanese administration. Municipalities are not able to be independent because of geographic or demographic factors," he said.

"We need to reconsider this to delegate power in order to enhance development. Everything currently is centralized to Beirut. Outside, you have slums and these are not only examples of poverty, these are threatening security."

Sources: ANND

*The Daily Star, journal published in Beirut*

### Time for Action! (and Discussion)

The second European Social Watch Report will be published on February 1 with a meeting in the European Parliament. The report focuses on social exclusion linking the internal and external dimensions, as well as the EU's response. The meeting will take place from 13.00 to 15.00.

The Report, titled "Time for Action: Responding to Poverty, Social Exclusions and Inequality in Europe and Beyond", will be available online at the SW European Coalitions website: [www.socialwatch.eu](http://www.socialwatch.eu)

The day before, January 31, watchers all over the region will be meeting, also in Brussels, to discuss how to strengthen the involvement of SW European Coalitions at European and international levels

There will be round-table discussions among watchers on key policy issues at national and European levels, in a coordinated way, as a way to identify concrete actions to carry out in the next two years

These are the issues to address:

- Potential for coordinating common responses as European coalitions;
- To identify specific areas of common interest;
- To identify possible funds and opportunities for strengthening common activity as Social Watch in Europe;
- Preparations for the Social Watch General Assembly 2011 scheduled for July in the Philippines;
- Identifying tools that are most useful to externally strengthen the European SW dimension and what internal tools could be more effective (i.e. website, newsletter);
- The possibility to organize capacity building workshops for strategizing the work of the network at the European level at the long term;
- The use and dissemination of the European Report;
- Alliance building;

(For further information, contact Yvette Pierret at [ypierret@eurostep.org](mailto:ypierret@eurostep.org))

### Sharon McIvor Takes Her Fight to the United Nations

Sharon McIvor announced last month that she will file a complaint against Canada at the United Nations. "Canada continues to discriminate against Aboriginal women and their descendants in the determination of eligibility for registration as an Indian. Versions of the Indian Act, going back to the 19th century, have given preference to male Indians as transmitters of status, and to descendants of male Indians. Despite amendments made to the Indian Act when the Charter came into effect in 1985, Aboriginal women are still not treated equally as transmitters of status, and many thousands of descendants of Aboriginal women are denied status as a result."

McIvor said: "I contested this discrimination under the Charter. It took twenty years in Canadian courts, and I achieved only partial success. Now I will seek full justice for Aboriginal women under international human rights law. Canada needs to be held to account for its intransigence in refusing to completely eliminate sex discrimination from the Indian Act and for decades of delay."

In 1994, Sharon McIvor brought a constitutional challenge to the sex discrimination in the registration provisions of the Indian Act. The B.C. Supreme Court ruled that section 6 of the Indian Act violated s. 15 of the Charter. However, when Canada appealed, the B.C. Court of Appeal ruled that although the Indian Act was discriminatory, the bulk of the discrimination was justified because the Government's purpose was to preserve the existing rights of the Aboriginal men and their descendants who had been given preferred status.

Parliament is now poised to pass a new amendment to the Indian Act, Bill C-3, in response to the Court of Appeal decision. But Bill C-3, if passed, will provide only a partial and inadequate solution to the sex discrimination. Bill C-3 will make some female line descendants newly eligible for status, but they will still have a lesser ability to transmit status than their male line counterparts. In addition, Bill C-3 will still exclude many descendants of Indian women who

were unmarried. As long as these Aboriginal women and their descendants continue to be ineligible for registration as Indians, sex discrimination will remain an entrenched characteristic of the Indian Act.

McIvor said: "Because neither Canadian courts nor Parliament have yet granted an adequate and effective remedy for the sex discrimination which has been a hallmark of the Indian Act for more than a hundred years, I will take my case to the United Nations Human Rights Committee."

This Committee is the United Nations treaty body that oversees compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Her complaint is filed under the Optional Protocol to that treaty.

The Government of Canada says that Bill C-3 will newly grant status to 45,000 Aboriginal women and their descendants. However, estimates are that there are another 200,000 that will still be left out.

"Many people in Canada, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, recognize that this long-standing discrimination against Aboriginal women and their descendants is wrong and should end. Before me, Mary Two-Axe Early, Jeanette Corbière Lavell, Yvonne Bedard, and Sandra Lovelace all fought to end sex discrimination against Aboriginal women in the status registration provisions in the Indian Act. I will continue, with the same determination they had, until Aboriginal women enjoy equality," said McIvor.

Source: Canadian Feminist Alliance For International Action (FAFIA)

### MDGs, the smallest common denominator possible a decade ago

The first meeting of the Reflection Group -- a joint initiative of Social Watch, Third World Network, DAWN, Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation, Global Policy Forum, terre des hommes and Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation -- took place January 12-14 in Berlin. As a first small input to the debate within the Group, the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation and Global Policy Forum published a paper titled "Thinking Ahead -Development Models and Indicators of Well-being Beyond the MDGs", written by Jens Martens.

Interviewed by IPS News, Jens Martens, Director of Global Policy Forum Europe, explained those concepts. This is the interview:

The clock is ticking to live up to the promises governments made a decade ago to improve the lives of hundreds of millions of people. But are those promises themselves inherently flawed?

With the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), adopted at the United Nations in 2000 and hailed as a once-in-a-generation opportunity, states and leading development policy institutions agreed upon a set of ambitious anti-poverty targets and a deadline of 2015.

In their current formulation, however, the MDGs embody an overly rigid and even anemic view of human development and well-being, says Jens Martens, director of the European office of the Global Policy Forum, an independent watchdog group that monitors the work of the United Nations and scrutinises global policymaking.

IPS news agency correspondent Rousbeh Legatis spoke to Martens about how these problems can be overcome and what alternative development models could provide a much-needed boost to the MDGs.

Q: Roughly speaking, the MDGs are meant to encourage development by improving social and economic conditions. How do you view the current development model and its political implications?

A: With their limited focus on income poverty and basic social services, the MDGs represent the smallest common denominator in development that was possible at the global level a decade ago. They reflect a narrow understanding of development that regards poverty eradication as a primarily technical challenge. As a consequence, many governments gave too little attention to structural aspects of development such as the distribution of income and wealth.

Q: After reading your analysis, one could draw the conclusion that the MDGs can already be called a failure. Is that so?

A: The MDGs didn't fail, but governments failed to provide the necessary means to achieve them. They still have another five years to prove that they take these goals seriously. However, development policy should not be limited to the MDGs.

We face important challenges, from climate change to the deficiencies of the global financial system, that are not properly covered by the current MDG catalogue. That's why we have to use the coming years to discuss additional goals that are valid for all countries in the world.

Q: What would be a better understanding of development, in terms of genuinely improving people's lives?

A: First of all, we have to overcome the dominant development model that is still oriented on a modernisation approach and that confuses economic growth with progress in society. This includes new measures and indicators of development and well-being beyond the GNP.

This is precisely what the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi-Commission recommended in its report 2009. According to [economist Joseph] Stiglitz and his colleagues, the time is ripe to shift emphasis from measuring economic production to measuring people's well-being. And this shift is not only relevant for rich countries, it applies to all countries of the world.

Q: Are there any existing initiatives that promote alternative development models?

A: Yes, over the last few years, a growing number of initiatives have emerged. One interesting example is the "Buen Vivir" approach. This is not so much a development model but a holistic life philosophy based on the view of indigenous peoples in the Andes region.

It pursues the goal of material, social and spiritual well-being among all members of a society, but not at the cost of the other members and the natural resources. The "Buen Vivir" approach already gained political relevance as it was anchored in the new constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia.

Another interesting example is the Gross National Happiness Index, developed in the Kingdom of Bhutan. It is based on an alternative concept of wealth beyond pure materialism and comprises a comprehensive set of economic, social, political and environmental indicators.

Q: Which model would you choose to overcome the main weaknesses of the existing MDG approach?

A: What we need are Global Development Goals with precise quantitative and time-bound targets that apply simultaneously to rich and poor countries. But there is no "one size fits all"-solution. The goals have to take into account the specific economic, social and environmental situation of the individual countries.

Time is over to regard "development" only as a process taking place in the southern hemisphere. Given the necessary transformation towards an equitable and environmentally sustainable development, virtually all countries of the world can be called developing countries.

This doesn't mean that the key principle of the Rio Declaration from 1992, the principle of "common but differentiated responsibility", is no longer relevant – quite the contrary!

And finally, the new set of Global Development Goals and indicators has to take into account that well-being and social progress essentially depend on the distribution of income and wealth as well as the capabilities an individual has in society.

Q: What role do you see for industrialised countries and international institutions like the OECD, G77 and UN?

A: Given its universal membership and its traditional openness to civil society, the U.N. remains the most important and legitimate forum to discuss development models and to adopt development goals. But what can be the future of institutions like the OECD, the classical organisation of the rich countries, or the G77, the group representing the interests of the developing world?

If dividing the world into industrialised and developing countries is becoming more and more of an anachronism, isn't this also true for these institutions?

Q: Do you see on the part of national and international decision makers enough political will to "think ahead"?

A: During the global financial crisis we witnessed interesting changes in the political discourse and examples of "thinking ahead", for instance in the discussion about a financial transaction tax. But, in the aftermath of the crisis there seems to be a return to business as usual. The same is true for the MDG Summit 2010 and the state of the climate negotiations.

The upcoming U.N. Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro 2012 can provide another window of opportunity to draw lessons from the multiple crises and to fundamentally rethink our goals and measures of development and progress – in North and South.

In order to stimulate this debate in the run-up to the Rio Conference 2012, a broad alliance of civil society groups, networks and foundations just launched the "Civil Society Reflection Group on Global Development Perspectives".

Among the supporters are Third World Network, Social Watch, DAWN, the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation, Global Policy Forum, terre des hommes, and the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation. In this group we will assess alternative models of development and well-being, reconsider development goals and indicators, draw conclusions for future development strategies and hopefully provide some food for thought and, ultimately, political action.

Source: IPS News ([www.ipsnews.net](http://www.ipsnews.net))

More information: <http://www.reflectiongroup.org/stuff/thinking-ahead>

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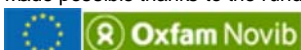
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