



"SAFEGUARDING ARAB YOUTH RIGHTS: NAVIGATING CHALLENGES AND CHARTING PROGRESS"

Nama Network of Human Rights Defenders Contribution Paper to the Human Rights 75 Youth Declaration

OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

About the Nama Network for Human Rights Defenders:

NAMA Network is a dynamic and dedicated network committed to advancing the cause of human rights defenders across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Our mission is to build capacity, provide unwavering support, and offer vital aid in the protection of young human rights defenders who courageously stand up for justice, equality, and human dignity in their communities.

Who We Are:

NAMA Network is a collaborative initiative comprising passionate individuals, activists, and advocates with diverse backgrounds and expertise. Together, we form a resilient community that believes in the transformative power of defending and promoting human rights. Our network serves as a platform for collective action, fostering collaboration, and amplifying the voices of young defenders who often face significant challenges in their vital work.

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Arab youth constitute a significant portion of the population, holding immense potential for driving positive change in the region. Written collaboratively by 30 youths from different Arab countries, this paper aims to shed light on the challenges they face across political, economic, civil, and cultural domains. It also provides recommendations to decision makers for addressing these challenges and outlines the commitments that Arab youth are willing to make to contribute to a brighter future.

Youth Rights Challenges in Arab Countries:

- **Political Challenges:**

1. Legislative Barriers: Arab countries often have legislation that hinders youth participation in political roles. Many set high age limits for political candidacy, such as 30 years, limiting opportunities for young people to engage in decision-making processes. For instance, Iraq, Egypt, Yemen, and other nations impose such restrictions.

2. Power Imbalance: The domination of political positions by established individuals with power and wealth obstructs young people's access to these roles. Financial influence and political maneuvering sideline the youth's participation and influence in politics.

3. Freedom of Expression: Expressing political opinions freely is a challenge for Arab youth, who often face harassment from authorities for expressing their political views. Legal guarantees of free expression in Arab constitutions are constrained by restrictive laws, preventing young individuals from fully engaging in the political discourse.

4. Erosion of Judicial Independence: Many Arab countries lack clear separation of powers, allowing the executive branch to encroach upon the judiciary. Executives often manipulate judicial processes to suppress politically active youth, undermining the principles of justice.

5. Occupation-Related Challenges: In Palestine, youth face multifaceted challenges imposed by the Israeli occupation. Activities in support of their political ideals can lead to arrests and persecution. Israeli authorities restrict their travel and movement, stifling their political participation.

- **Economic, Civil, and Cultural Challenges:**

1. Economic Struggles: High poverty rates and alarming unemployment plague Arab youth due to a lack of comprehensive policies to attract investments and create job opportunities. Companies often prioritize foreign labor over local youth, limiting their access to quality jobs.

2. Regional Disparities: Opportunities are unevenly distributed, favoring capital cities. This forces youth to incur significant expenses to access opportunities, perpetuating geographic inequality.

3. Administrative Corruption: Administrative corruption in many Arab countries obstructs youth's entry into the public sector. Nepotism and favoritism often determine job placements, disregarding merit and capability.

4. Human Rights Violations: Youth in politically unstable Arab nations endure violations during official investigations, such as warrantless searches, travel bans, and arbitrary detentions. Physical and psychological abuse during investigations is rampant.

5. Access to Basic Rights: Basic rights like education and healthcare are inequitably distributed across Arab nations, disproportionately affecting youth. Facilities are often subpar, hindering their development.

6. Marginalization of Refugees and Minorities: Refugees and minority youth face marginalization in Arab countries, lacking meaningful integration efforts. Discrimination and mistreatment further alienate them from social fabric.

7. Gender Discrimination: Female youth in Arab societies continue to face gender-based discrimination, including legal disparities and societal expectations. Early marriage and limited access to education and healthcare compound their struggles.

8. Forced Conscription: Arab youth in politically and security-unstable countries face the phenomenon of forced conscription into non-state armed groups, namely militias. This places them as participants in conflict zones without consideration for their fundamental rights guarantees.

- **Recommendations to Decision Makers:**

1. Reform Legislative Frameworks: Amend laws to lower age limits for political candidacy, enabling young individuals to participate in decision-making processes from an early stage.

2. Enhance Political Transparency: Establish regulations to minimize the impact of wealth and power on political positions, ensuring equal opportunities for youth engagement.

3. Promote Free Expression: Enforce and enhance laws protecting freedom of expression, allowing young people to contribute to the political discourse without fear.

4. Strengthen Judicial Independence: Implement measures to safeguard the independence of the judiciary, preventing executive overreach and ensuring just legal processes.

5. Youth-Centric Economic Policies: Develop policies to attract investments, create job opportunities, and prioritize youth employment in both the private and public sectors.

6. Equitable Regional Development: Invest in regions outside capital cities, providing equal access to opportunities and reducing geographic disparities.

7. Anti-Corruption Initiatives: Implement transparent recruitment processes in the public sector to curb corruption and promote merit-based employment.

8. Human Rights Protections: Ensure human rights are upheld during investigations, preventing abuse and upholding due process.

9. Equal Access to Basic Rights: Develop comprehensive policies to provide quality education and healthcare to all youth, regardless of their background.

10. Inclusive Policies for Refugees and Minorities: Implement integration initiatives for refugees and minority youth, combating discrimination and fostering inclusivity.

11. Gender Equality Initiatives: Enact laws and policies that promote gender equality, including tackling early marriage and supporting female education and employment.

12. End Forced Conscription: Implement legal measures to prohibit forced conscription of Arab youth by non-state armed groups and militias, accompanied by alternative opportunities, enhanced oversight, support for reintegration, and awareness campaigns to safeguard their rights and prevent their involvement in armed conflict.

13. Establish an Official Youth Rights Mandate: Create an official mandate for "Youth Rights" that outlines the specific rights, opportunities, and protections afforded to young individuals. This mandate should ensure that youth have a voice in decision-making processes and that their rights are enshrined in law.

- **Youth Commitments:**

Arab youth are committed to advocating for their rights, engaging in politics, supporting social justice, combating corruption, participating in economic development, and fostering intercultural understanding. They pledge to be active citizens and contribute positively to their societies, envisioning a brighter future for the Arab world and entire world.

Empowering Arab youth is crucial for the sustainable development of the region. Addressing the challenges, they face requires coordinated efforts from decision makers, civil society, and the international community. By recognizing the potential of youth and implementing inclusive policies, Arab nations can harness their energy and creativity to create positive change and shape a prosperous future.