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# Getting Transition Right: A Rights-Based Approach to Diversity And Inclusivity

Saturday, November 2, 2013

## Writing and blogging from the session

We know many of you here are writers, journalists and bloggers and we welcome submission.

If you're interested in writing either an op-ed style article or a personal reflection blog post whilst you're here this week, please let Salzburg Global Editor, Louise Hallman know or email your submission directly to [lhallman@salzburgglobal.org](mailto:lhallman@salzburgglobal.org).

If you intend to write for your own publication either whilst you're here or afterward the session, please make sure to observe the **Chatham House Rule** (information on which is in your Welcome Pack). If you're in any doubt, do not hesitate to contact Louise.



Fellows discuss the state of the discourse and reality surrounding diversity and inclusivity in their country

## Regaining optimism

### Civil society engagement, culture of respect for human rights and rule of law needed to get new democracies back on track

**“Anyone who works in human rights is, by definition, optimistic,”** said Fateh Azzam, chair of the Arab Human Rights Fund at the opening session of the Salzburg Global Seminar program ‘Getting Transition Right: A Rights-Based Approach to Diversity and Inclusivity’.

But, admitted Azzam, who was speaking alongside Ghanim al Najjar, professor of political science at Kuwait University, these are pessimistic times in the Middle East and North Africa region.

Since the heady days of 2011, which saw several decades-old dictatorships across the region toppled in mere months of each other as whole swathes of society – men and women, old and young, Christian and Muslim – took to the streets to demand greater human rights and social equity, the early optimism has faded.

In all four of the focus countries for the five-day program – Egypt, Libya, Yemen and even Tunisia – progress has stalled or in some cases rolled back. As

one Fellow said: “Death has become the new normal.”

So far violence has been the most evident driver of change in the region, but engaging civil society is key to getting this democratic progress back on track.

Civil society has a great role to play in delivering fairer, more inclusive change, embracing of all the diverse peoples and communities that exist across the MENA region.

Diversity has always existed in the Middle East; despite the earlier prevalence of Arab nationalism, the region has never been homogenous. These diverse voices jointly clambered for change in the region, but they are not all currently engaged in the process.

As the Fellows’ group discussions widely agreed, diversity and inclusion is a good thing – yet diverse voices, primarily women and minorities, are not being included in the broader discourse.

To instil diversity and inclusivity in these nascent democracies two things

must be established: a culture of respect for human rights and trust in the rule of law. But which must come first? Can one lead to another? How long will it take to establish in countries that appear to be so far behind in adopting international norms?

Many of these diverse sectors of society are primarily interested in their own preservation over human rights for all. But unexpected alliances have emerged. Negative feelings towards Islamists in the wake of the ousting of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt have led to greater public condemnation of attacks on Copts, for example. But how can these alliances be sustained, even as situations change? How can we map these actors and their alliances?

Do we need to address a “hierarchy of rights”? How can we even talk about minority rights when the right to life for all is not guaranteed in such violent societies?

These questions and many more (await the 45 Fellows’ consideration over the next four days.