

“Morocco is far away from Islamic extremism,” says Chairman of the Moroccan Human Rights Council, Driss El Yazami

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Driss El Yazami is Human Rights defender who had worked extensively in France, before he was appointed as the Chairman of The National Human Rights Council of Morocco in 2011. He is the Director of Générique, an association specialized in the history of foreigners and immigration in France, and chief editor of the Migrations journal. Mr. El Yazami, is also the former Vice-President of the French League of Human Rights (LDH), former Secretary General of the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH) and former member of the Executive Committee of the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network. Since 2004, he has been president of the Euro-Mediterranean Foundation of Support to Human Rights Defenders and member of the board of the Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration in France (museum of immigration history).

Mr. El Yazami who has also been knighted with the Legion of Honor of the French Republic, on July 14th, 2010 caught up with the Editor-in-Chief of The Oslo Times International News Network, Hafez Mokhtar for a , on issues relating to the overall Human Rights situation in Morocco including gender inequality and freedom of opinion,

The Excerpts below give us an important insight into the Human Rights situation in the North African Kingdom:

Can you tell me a little bit about this conference?

Brazil organized the first edition of the 'World Forum of Human Rights' in 2013 and Morocco organized its second edition because it believes that southern countries should be active players in the protection of human rights. So far southern countries are seen as consumers in terms of human rights initiatives, and the ability of the southern nations to contribute in protecting human rights is debated. Today we would like to be perceived by the world as constructors of the human rights of the 21st century. We would like to participate in writing conventions for human rights on emerging subjects or issues. Today, for example, there has been thoughts on having a convention on business and human rights. Today there are also thoughts on having an international convention on old people. There have been movements at the international level for the universality of Human rights advances. Human rights have become an important variable in all human societies as well as in international relations. However, at the same time some regressions are seen in some societies. For example movements by right wing parties in some western countries, which practice Islamophobia and the use of religion for politics, in country like ours, that restricts other people's right to life, are also challenging the universality of human rights laws. Its universality is also protested by the international economic order, as some states today are stronger than the rest of the states.

How do you access the human rights condition in Morocco?

Morocco had gone through a check and balance reform process ten years ahead of the so-called Arab Spring. This process focused on three primary elements: firstly the king first implemented a nuance for equity and reconciliation to solve the problems of human rights violations that prevalent in contemporary Moroccan society before he came into power; secondly the the family code was reformed in 2004 and finally he promoted cultural pluralism by considering the civil and political rights of all citizens to ensure equality between them all.

Which sector of the Moroccan society do you find equality in?

Gender equality between men and women in Morocco is not achieved yet. Despite this, the family code of 2004 ensured inclusion of the gender equality issues within the 2011 constitution itself though it's been limited to paper only so far. Its implementation has been hindered by existing societal challenges that run deep into the Moroccan society. However, the actualization of these provisions is being aided by side revolutions, which are supporting women's cause. Most of our girls in Morocco, especially those in the urban areas, are graduating these days. All our girls receive formal education. The case is very different in rural areas. The girls there are allowed to go to school only till they finish primary school education. After that they are pulled out of schools and deprive them from going to college for higher degrees. This is where the problem lies.

Another part of this silent revolution is the demographic transition. Thirty years back 7.2 percent of new-borns in Morocco would be a girl but today the percentage is 2.10. It's an important part of the reforms. Besides that, the reforms have helped in paving way for the women to the job market. Their rate of activity in employment is very less as compared to men, and this shows that the discrimination against woman is being gradually addressed. There are progressions as well as regressions. Besides the state, in the past women were victimized by social attitudes, but now its gradually being addressed. There are certain bottlenecks in securing the active and actual implementations of the agreed upon laws and rules, thus pressing more on the need to prepare a fundamental work to change the society and the nation.

What's your opinion on the rise in Islamic extremism in North Africa?

Morocco is far away from all this. Islamic extremism is very, very, very limited in Morocco. There have been a few terrorist attacks in Morocco including the Marrakesh. This is due to the legitimacy of the King and a religious tradition that is based on moderate Islam.

What is the condition of media freedom and freedom of expression in Morocco?

After an year-long debate on the press code, Morocco now has a draft of the press code in place which rules out banishment or imprisonment for journalists, though there are some fines that might charged as corrective measures. It envisions for establishing a national press council, which will be led professionals and regulated by us. So the sector wont be regulated by the government anymore. Morocco has been witnessing mass publication of newspapers and due to technological revolution, today 8.5million Moroccans are connected to the world through the internet. So we have already overcome censors.

So the Moroccan press is not under censorship?

There are censors, but these has been limited to only a few as cases against them continue in the court. These will be lifted up as soon as the court delivers a verdict. Our biggest challenge today is to enable the press itself to process its own regulation instead of the government. The press itself should have such authority.

What system of governance does Morocco follow?

This question should be asked to other participants participating in the event and discussing this issue. Morocco is a democratic nation that is going through the process of consolidation. Today, for example, its first source of law is the parliament and the government emanates from elections. Like the whole region, the main challenge for Morocco is to reform peacefully, by taking into consideration all the points of views around; that of the extreme left, of political Islamist, liberals, conservatives feminists, and of those who think we are Arabs or Berbers. Democracy is the capacity to manage peacefully, the divergent views prevalent in the society. We are managing to consolidate divergent views peacefully, unlike countries, which are not far away from us, that use revolvers. And that's the difference. Tunisia and Morocco are countries that are reforming peacefully, within pluralism, with strong constitutions. Despite the fact that the constitution has not fully been implemented in morocco and we gradually consolidating democracy, we look forward to implement laws in accordance to the constitution. Implementing some of the constitutional provisions will take time but this is the price for peaceful discussions.

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