

# **Tunis Declaration on modern direct Democracy 2015**

Tunisia is in transition.

So is direct democracy around the world.

We are Tunisians. We are Africans. We are Europeans. We are Asians. We are from the Americas. We come from all kinds of communities, from every corner of the globe, and from all walks of life. Among us are scholars, trade unionists, journalists, activists, campaign organizers, philanthropists, elected officials, election administrators, NGO leaders, lawyers, businesspeople, farmers, students, citizens, engineers, and the unemployed.

We have met for four days at the University of Carthage's INAT campus to discuss direct democracy, participation and decentralization at a free and open forum in Tunis, Tunisia, to which the entire world was invited. Those of us who came from other places were impressed to learn more about the successes of the revolution and the progress Tunisia has made. We also were reminded that Tunisians have a very long way to go on their journey to a better democracy.

But don't we all?

We see this shared journey as taking our societies not only from dictatorship to democracy but also from democracy to true participatory democracy. We know that representative democracy, while essential, is not enough by itself. We are in transition from low-turnout elections to robust new forms of participation that give us more power, but also ask more of us.

We believe that the development of democracy requires decentralization of power. And we know that such decentralizations are so challenging that participation must be more than a goal. Participation must itself be part of the decentralizing process at every level. And to make that a reality, we need better participatory tools -- and better assessments of how well direct democracy and other participatory tools work.

Participation requires more than words in a constitution, or provisions in a law. It requires a supportive infrastructure -- freedom and transparency (especially to counter corruption) and secure spaces (including online) and independent citizen media and strong social movements and economic resources and civil society organizations -- that allow people to connect to each other, and to make their voices heard. We are encouraged by the articles on participation in the Tunisian constitution and by the Arab World's first participatory budgeting experiments in Tunisian cities, but there is much more to be done.

Participation means that economic decisions, whether they involve the world's largest trade agreements or small city trash services, are based on democracy, not money. Participation and democracy demand equality for all and leadership from all,

especially for and from those who have been excluded in the past—most urgently the young and women. It is long past time for women to rule in democracy.

Let's also be clear: We wholeheartedly reject the idea that democracy is a garment that only fits some people, or some societies, or some faiths. Democracy is a shirt that can stretch to fit us all.

There are people who have said that democracy is impossible in the Arab World. But here we are in Tunisia, the Arab World's first democracy. There are people who say democracy and Islam are not compatible. But here, again, we are in Tunisia. And we have heard here that Islamic principles do not need to be in contradiction with democracy, and vice versa.

Direct democracy should have no single home. We hope and pray for the day when democracy resides wherever people form communities. Democracy must be the right and responsibility of every individual, whoever you are, whatever your economic or social status.

We offer this statement, the Tunis Declaration, on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of May, 2015. We welcome the suggestions, corrections, and contributions of the world.