

Appeal to save the Arab Institute for Human Rights

We, the parties signing the present appeal, as part of our conviction for the need to spread the culture of human rights and the need for education based upon the respect for human rights, having monitored closely or from a distance the activities and publications of the Arab Institute for Human Rights (AIHR), which has provided training for thousands of managers and trainers by introducing them to the mechanisms for defending just causes and which has become a landmark and an area for dialogue and in-depth thought on human rights issues, appeal to the Tunisian government to lift the embargo by which the institute has been stricken for months and which consists of a freeze imposed on its assets, a freeze that has paralysed its activities and deprived its officials of their fees and their social security and health cover.

The Arab Institute for Human Rights is an Arab non-governmental organisation founded in 1989 on the initiative of the Arab Organisation for Human Rights, the Arab Lawyers' Union and the Tunisian Human Rights League, with support from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNESCO and UNICEF. The mission adopted by the Institute is in line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the complementary international instruments. To achieve its objectives, the Institute cooperates with all Arab governments and national, regional and international organisations, irrespective of whether they are governmental or non-governmental. Its financing is based upon support from international and regional organisations, sponsors and bodies concerned by human rights. The Institute accepts financing that does not contain any conditions restricting its independence. Such financing is subject to contracts that accurately and clearly stipulate the terms governing their management.

We fail to see any legitimate reason to freeze the Institute's assets and would like to express our astonishment at seeing the Tunisian authorities use the antiterrorism laws as a pretext for freezing the assets of an organisation that strives to raise awareness and promote an educational system that replaces the culture of violence, fanaticism and terrorism with respect for the right to life, the right to be different and the right to freedom and justice.

To demonstrate the Institute's credibility and the important and serious policies that it has been spearheading ever since it was founded, it is worth mentioning that it was awarded the UNESCO Prize for Human Rights Education, that it has been granted the status of Observer for or enjoys executive relations with various organisations, including the Arab Standing Committee for Human Rights, the United Nations Economic and Social Council, the United Nations Department of Public Information, UNESCO, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the IOF (International Organisation for French-speaking communities), and so on. The Institute also maintains partnership relations with Arab ministries of human rights, universities and the international NGOs, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, Amnesty International, the International Federation for Human Rights, the Foundation for Human Rights Services, Penal Reform International and other organisations working towards human rights around the world.

To underline the importance of the Institute and the extent of the void that would arise from the dissolution or freezing of its activities, simply look at its research and the dozens of publications and training sessions focused on issues relating to human rights education, women's rights, children's rights, refugees' rights and minority groups' rights, as well as democracy-related issues. One cannot fail to admire the variety, density and academic value of its publications, despite its limited resources.

To illustrate the Institute's contribution towards the spreading of the human rights culture and the efforts to ensure that the culture is firmly rooted in everyday life and the public space, we need but name the beneficiaries: non-governmental organisations working in the field of human rights, unions, women's organisations, youth organisations, children's organisations, lawyers' and doctors' governing bodies, journalists' unions, schools and educational institutions, governmental institutions charged with human rights: security services, prison services, public sector employees responsible for enforcing laws, the judicial and legal apparatus, as well as wide swathes of society that may influence the promotion of human rights.

There is good reason to believe that any impediment to the Institute's policies shall breach the very principles of democracy and deal a severe blow to the leeway required for the advent of a true non-trading company. We refuse to witness the destruction of the Institute, along with all the invaluable expertise and experience that it has acquired. We urge the Tunisian authorities to take the necessary measures to clear the obstacles impeding this prestigious institute and hereby proclaim the foundation of the International Committee for the Defence of the Arab Institute for Human Rights.

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Signing parties: