



EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,

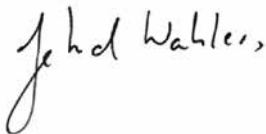
Various attributes have been assigned to the recent rebellions and upheavals in the Arab World and in North Africa in particular: rebellion by the young, by the disadvantaged as well as by those who had been barred or at least hindered from genuine participation in political, economic and social life. All these observations are valid, but they are not complete without looking at the other side of the coin: they also involved to a large extent females.

Young women were a strong presence in the demonstrations on the Avenue Bourguiba and in Tahrir Square. They conducted themselves peacefully, purposefully and assertively. To them, marking the end of autocratic rule was not only linked to hope for a new political system, but also particularly to the hope of seeing their own rights strengthened and valued as well as enforced. Since, in spite of their secular outlook, the old rulers tended towards patriarchal patterns of behaviour. From the very start the uprising was linked to a clamouring for greater rights and increased political involvement of women, which goes against the classic division of social spaces, according to which the exterior world is reserved for men while a woman's place is considered to be in the home. This is illustrated particularly strongly by the social media, which in the Arab world are used by disproportionately large numbers of young women. Women are demanding their place in society and in politics, and Arab societies need to realise that it is in their interest to enforce these rights. It would also be beneficial to the development of their countries.

Many countries in the region have already paid lip service to this. Egypt signed the anti-discrimination convention of the United Nations in 1981 and committed to increase the proportion of women in political posts as part of the Millennium Goals. However, on examination the makeup of the Egyptian parliament leaves one disappointed: Fewer than

two per cent of the representatives are women. In addition, there is an increasing apprehension that the Islamisation of the countries in the region, which is no longer merely a creeping phenomenon, may set the women's rights agenda back a long way, eroding the achievements of the past – which for the most part are modest as it is. Women's rights activists and female supporters of increasing Islamisation are diametrically opposed on this question.

Even Tunisia, which was regarded for decades as the model Arab state where women's rights were concerned, has experienced discussions over the last few months that have once again driven women onto the streets to demonstrate vociferously. The Tunisian women exemplify that standing up for rights is not a Western import, but that it is sustained by a strong demand from their midst. Tunisia has demonstrated the indispensable contribution to the country's development that women make. The same applies to the sub-Saharan countries, as the articles by Ute Gierczynski-Bocandé and Elke Erlecke in this issue illustrate. Our representative from Benin reports on the ongoing battle for equal rights fought by many women and the resilience that is needed to become for society as a whole what women are already in their families: the motor that drives development.



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