



After several years of exile in Paris, the question of returning to my own country, Tunisia, did not simply arise – it was imposed. Today, more than a year after the first free elections in Tunisia, the National Constituent Assembly, which is responsible for providing the country with a new constitution, is struggling to form a genuine democracy, writes **Amira Yahyaoui**.

Tunisia: Our post-revolutionary struggle

DURING PRESIDENT BEN Ali's era, acting from outside the country had a certain significance; our diaspora was the voice of those fighting on the ground. In a country where prisoners of conscience were counted in their hundreds, where the media was gagged, and where fear was the common denominator of an entire population, being able to alert international organisations of the government's abuses [of power], to speak to the foreign media, and to apply diplomatic pressure, was a way of helping those fighting on the ground, despite our frustration at not being there ourselves.

The revolution put an end to this frustration, forcing us to face up to our responsibilities. It no longer made sense to remain abroad; the work was to be done at home and nowhere else. Although it is possible to bring down a dictatorship from the outside, as we have seen in several other countries, for the rebuilding of the country we needed to be there in person.

It was following this realisation that I, along with many other politically active Tunisians living abroad, returned permanently to Tunisia. Since then, my work has involved two things: attempting to establish a culture of accountability and political transparency, and defending the rights and freedoms I had fought for under the dictatorship.

Today, more than a year after

the first free elections in Tunisia, the National Constituent Assembly, which is responsible for providing the country with a new constitution, is struggling to form a genuine democracy. There are 217 elected members who are responsible for writing the constitution and, for some of them, freedom of speech must be guaranteed but strictly limited to what is sacred, women must have their place but only as 'partners' of men rather than their equal, the press must be able to speak but without complete independence, transitional justice must clean up the country but not immediately, the life of each Tunisian is sacred until we talk about capital punishment...and so on and so forth.

Furthermore, the constitution is being written without any input from the citizens. The National Constituent Assembly is a bunker from which very little information emerges. The results of votes are never published, commission reports are not made public, and, like all exclusive clubs, to enter the Constituent Assembly you must either be invited or accompanied by an elected member. It is against all this that we, together with the members of Al Bawsala and several other active voices in civil society, are fighting every day. This is our post revolutionary struggle.

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(Above) A student protestor in Tunis. (Right) A woman walks in front of a graffiti stating: "Democracy – Proud to be Tunisians!"



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we are facing and this is what makes this constitution so important – not only for the future of the nation, but even more for the future of the region.

Undoubtedly, certain battles have been won. The first is that of freedom of expression and freedom of organisation. Others are still being fought, such as putting an end to discrimination towards women – an area where Tunisia had made considerable progress and was seen as an example for many societies in the Arab world and beyond. Although the road still seems very long, the dynamic nature of civil society in Tunisia suggests that this country will ultimately succeed. In spite of the economic situation and the Salafist threat (the Salafists represent fundamental Muslims in political circles and society), we are succeeding in influencing debates and defending our rights. Tunisia is a small country, devoid of natural resources, and it is perhaps from this that its salvation will come. Our country is crying out for tourism, education and investment. Tunisia is a country condemned to remain open. ■**NA**

Amira is a 27 year-old Tunisian human rights activist who has been working for the past decade to promote human rights in Tunisia. Following the revolution in early 2011, she continues to focus on freedom of expression, with an emphasis on anti-censorship. She was Sawt Mostakel candidate in the Tunisian election last year, as head of an independent youth list.