



Arab Association for Democracy

Foundation Declaration

In an atmosphere filled with the spirit of responsibility and a genuine interest in spreading and maintaining democracy, a select group of Arab thinkers and intellectuals representing 14 countries convened in Sana'a on June 13-14. Following careful discussions and well-thought-out debates, the participants agreed to establish the Arab Association for Democracy (AAD). They also adopted the Arab Covenant for Democracy in which they defined the objectives and means to help create the necessary requirements for democratization.

As a legal and intellectual entity, the AAD is part of the Arab civil society. It is therefore not affiliated to any government, external agency or any political or religious groups. Although the AAD is created to reflect the unique character of the Arab society, its culture, spiritual and universal values, it takes into account the spirit of our times and the global trends towards democracy, reform, the rule of law, social justice, plurality, the peaceful succession to power, the separation of the different branches of power, the autonomy of the judiciary, respect of human rights and freedom of expression.

The AAD founding panel has assigned a follow up committee headed by Dr. Abdulkareem Al Eryani, the Chairperson of Cultural Bridges Forum (CBF). Representatives from the National Center for Human Rights and Development of Democracy (NCHRDD) and Amman Centers for Human Rights Studies (ACHRS) are members in the follow up committee which shall work to prepare for another meeting for the Association to be held during the upcoming three months. This meeting will be dedicated to discuss the AAD internal regulation, its strategic action plan and the election of its general secretariat. The participants extend thanks and appreciation to the three organizers the CBF, NCHRDD and ACHRS for their efforts in preparing and organizing the event. They also would like to sincerely thank the people, leadership and civil society of Yemen for their kind hospitality and warm reception.

As it launches this declaration, the AAD invites all civil society organizations in the Arab world and all agencies concerned in boosting democracy to cooperate and collaborate in full transparency. It also extends its hand to everyone as it strives to achieve its objectives and lives up to its principles.

Sana'a, the Republic of Yemen

14 June 2007



The Arab Covenant for Democracy

The call to democracy in the Arab World is picking up an increasing momentum as being a prerequisite to social and historical progress. However, the reality presents a daunting gap between the community and the political power which in most cases is not the product of free choice and therefore becomes a weakening factor for both the state and the national unity. This gap has encouraged the emergence of fragmentary and divisive identities which threaten the national and Arab identity. It has also suppressed the feeling by ordinary Arabs of citizenship, equality and freedom and set them apart from effective participation in the public domain. This has sapped their ability to stand up to external challenges which put the very future of this nation at grave stake.

Our call to democracy stems from pure national realities and has no connection with calls which, under the banner of democracy, work towards dominance and control. Falling back on the external factor to appropriate the struggle of the long-standing national Arab democrats is no longer acceptable.

Based on these facts and the "International Bill of Human Rights" a select group of Arab thinkers and intellectuals takes the initiative to establish the **Arab Association for Democracy** with the objective to disseminate and reinforce democracy awareness, to create the necessary requirements for the culture of democracy and a sustainable democratization to reach the state of equal citizenship and the rule of law. The Arab Association for Democracy (AAD), as part of Arab civil society movement, aspires to become a source to spread and maintain democracy.

i. Objectives and Principles

- 1- The work to adopt the principle of citizenship as the basis for the social contract.
- 2- Equality in rights and obligations as a principle should be reasserted with no discrimination because of race, religion, gender, social origin, political or intellectual affiliation or any other consideration.
- 3- Strong commitment to the comprehensive and indivisible human rights system which begins with the right to life and develops to include other fundamental rights such the right to expression, belief, association, political participation and other social, economic and educational rights including the rights to peace and development and to benefit from the scientific and technical achievements as well as the right to clean environment.
- 4- The spread of democracy awareness to become the basis for achieving the Arab aspirations in cooperation and integration and all forms of joint work.



- 5- The struggle to empower women of their full rights by disseminating the awareness of the importance of women empowerment at the social, political, economic and legal levels.
- 6- On the basis of the two principles of citizenship and equality, the rights of ethnic, religious, and cultural minorities are to be ensured as being genuine ingredient of democracy and human rights. The problems of the marginalized, the displaced, refugees and people with special needs are to be addressed.
- 7- The struggle to help the civil society transfer from being a mere force for protest and opposition to become an active force of involvement and proposition which contributes actively in drafting bills that reflect the social whole and also to enhance democracy within the civil society organizations.
- 8- The Arab Association for Democracy seeks to reach its objectives through peaceful and constitutional means. It, therefore, rejects all forms of violence that endanger social peace and national unity including the use of the armed force to assume power. The Association is independent of any external, governmental, political or religious party and believes in the accumulative and gradual growth and the culture of dialogue to bring about the desired democratization.
- 9- Development is a collective and individual right. It can not be achieved without enhanced democracy as a domain for transparency, a means to combating corruption and a way to good governance, separation of the different branches of power and autonomous judiciary.
- 10- Respect of the right of difference which is a basic right in a pluralistic, diverse and free society to ensure the respect of people's choice through fair and free elections the sole purpose of which is to achieve peaceful transfer of power.
- 11- Strong conviction in our national and cultural uniqueness and the contribution of the Arab and Islamic civilization to human thought. However, by no means should this uniqueness become a pretext to pass up the common criteria for democratization or to defend repressive regimes.

ii- Means to Achieve Objectives

1. Organizing forums and conferences to discuss issues of democratization and to introduce Arab, regional and international experiences in democracy.
2. Publishing studies and researches in issues of democracy and democratization including electoral systems and election issue and polling of public opinion.
3. Translating and publishing useful global experiences of democratization in the form of booklets and pamphlets to ensure easy public access to such publications.
4. Organizing workshops to different sectors and groups in order to disseminate legal and democratic awareness especially among the



youth, women, the marginalized, displaced, refugees and people with special needs.

5. Designing and implementing educational programs in democracy and democratization for civil society activists, political parties' rank and files as well as activists in the religious institution with the view to build capacity and spread democratic orientation.
6. Designing and implementing seminars and workshops for specific governmental agencies particularly in the sectors of the police, the army, the judiciary and senior state officials with the objective to propagate legal and democratic awareness, achieve the rule of law and ensure proper law enforcement.
7. Taking benefit from the various media means especially the TV in spreading legal awareness and the culture of democracy and also ensure proper training and qualification for the media men in areas of legal and democratic culture. Work should be done to create a website devoted to the culture of democracy and dialogue.
8. Taking benefit from the unbiased international platforms in the areas of training and qualification as well as in getting acquainted with international experiences.
9. Coordinating with the relevant intellectual and academic institutions which embrace the same objectives and means.
10. Encouraging the governments to join the international treaties and conventions pertaining to the respect and protection of human rights and democratization and if necessary change their constitutions, laws and regulations in line with the objectives and principles included in the Arab Covenant for Democracy.

As they declare this Covenant, the founders of the Arab Association for Democracy strongly believe that the larger the circle of supporters of democracy grows, the narrower the means of suppression and appropriation of the rights of the people to choose or replace their rulers through peaceful and legitimate means become. Then and only then can the terms of this Covenant turn into a real force that is difficult to root out or take lightly.