



# PROJECT on Middle East Democracy

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**"From Revolution to Democracy: The Next Generation of Democracy Builders"**  
**Freedom House**  
**1301 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington D.C.**  
**April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2011 12:00-2:00 PM**

On Tuesday, **Freedom House** hosted an event on the political transition within Tunisia following the overthrow of President **Ben Ali** and prior to the Constituent Assembly elections on July 24<sup>th</sup>. The talk also addressed the promulgation of a new electoral law by the interim government that institutes gender parity in upcoming elections. The speaker was **Sofiene Chourabi** a journalist, blogger and civil society activist, who discussed the developments on the ground and the challenges facing Tunisians with regard to the upcoming election and the role of youth in shaping and driving forward the transition.

**Marwan Maalouf** opened the discussion stating that one of the most important issues in Tunisia currently is the role that religion and women will play in the new government as well as how to deal with remnants of the old regime. He stated that a high committee which included Sofiene has been facilitating the interim period and that it is important that the progress that they have made on human rights and gender parity in elections is not overturned.

Sofiene began by stating that although the old regime has been overthrown that Tunisians are still seeking to remove regime elements entirely. He warned that the "**bet is on**" on how the Constituent Assembly will be formed and whether or not the assembly will be representative of the people. With the increase in plurality within Tunisia, Sofiene asserted that there is a great debate about the role that the Islamist movement will play in future governance.

A major challenge facing the future of Tunisia is "establishing a culture of democracy," according to Sofiene. He also questioned how the current power "vacuum" will be filled and that there is a grave possibility that forces will take it in the wrong direction. Sofiene stated that the Constituent Assembly may reverse the work that has been done so far in the areas of human rights, gender equality and social justice. This he stated was of great importance even if Islamists were elected. On the issue of free press, Sofiene argued that the press is still far from free and that there need to be serious steps mad in securing "**responsible media.**"

With a strong fear over the return of the dictatorship, Sofiene stated that a national pact should be agreed upon before the Constituent Assembly comes to power to re-write the constitution. This will ensure that the gains during the revolution are not lost.

When asked to describe the process of passing Tunisia's new gender parity law, Sofiene stated that some refused within the council including Muslim and Islamist representatives as well as some secular progressive movements. Although for different reasons, these groups according to Sofiene opposed the proposed law, however, they were defeated and a majority of the interim government believed that

equality should be enforced. Ultimately though, Sofiene stated that the cabinet will have to agree upon this proposal before it will become law. Sofiene was asked whether or not Tunisians sought international support in creating a democracy, and he stated that they indeed had a lot to learn from countries that had democratic experience because in Tunisia, "**political enlightenment is low as far as democracy is concerned.**" He also stated that in the interim they should learn from the experiences of other democracies including Turkey and Latin American countries, but stated that Tunisia needs to establish its own example.