



VoiceForJustice.org

(Call for support when the Egyptian Revolution began on 25th January, 2011)

February 2011

Dear Friends and supporters,

Millions of brave Egyptians are right now facing a fateful choice. Thousands have been jailed, injured or killed in the last few days. But if they press on in peaceful protest, they could end decades of tyranny.

The protesters have appealed for international solidarity, but the dictatorship knows the power of unity at a time like this – they've desperately tried to cut Egyptians off from the world and each other by completely shutting down the internet and mobile networks.

Satellite and radio networks can still break through the regime blackout -- **let's flood those airwaves with a massive cry of solidarity showing Egyptians that we stand with them,** and that we'll try our best to hold our governments accountable to stand with them too.

The situation is at a tipping point -- every hour counts

People power is sweeping the Middle East. In days, peaceful protesters brought down Tunisia's 30-year dictatorship. Now the protests are spreading to Egypt, Yemen, Jordan and beyond.

If tyranny falls in Egypt, a tidal wave of democracy could sweep the entire region.

Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak has tried to crush the rallies. But with incredible bravery and determination, the protesters keep coming.

There are moments when history is written not by the powerful, but by people. This is one of them. The actions of ordinary Egyptians in the coming hours will have a massive effect on their country, the region, and our world.

Mubarak's family has left the country, but last night he ordered the military into the streets. He's ominously promised zero tolerance for what he calls 'chaos.' Either way, **history will be made in the next few days.** Let's make this the moment that shows every dictator on our planet that they cannot stand long against the courage

of people united.

With hope and admiration for the Egyptian people,

Dr. Hasanat Mohammad Husain
Voice for Justice World Forum
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1 February 2011

Young Arabs have crossed the Rubicon

By Hasan Zillur Rahim

"I do have an unyielding belief that all people yearn for certain things: the ability to speak your mind and have a say in how you are governed; confidence in the rule of law and the equal administration of justice; government that is transparent and doesn't steal from the people; the freedom to live as you choose. Those are not just American ideas, they are human rights, and that is why we will support them everywhere."

Those were the stirring words of President Obama when he gave his Cairo speech in June of 2009. But eloquence and oratory cannot mask reality. As Egyptians rise in revolt against the kleptocracy of Hosni Mubarak, the Obama administration is adjusting its sails against the unexpected wind of change sweeping Egypt. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton initially praised Egypt's "stability" under Mubarak but now that the Arabs have crossed Rubicon, she is using words like "restraint" and "reform" and urging "transition to a democratic regime."

Why does the United States find itself so often on the wrong side of history, at least initially? Why does it so easily settle for a Faustian bargain with autocrats like Mubarak who has kept his country in a state of emergency for three decades? For the Muslim world, in particular, America's policy has been driven by an irrational combination of oil, Israel and Islamic terror. Mubarak used the bogeyman of "Islamic Jihadists" (Muslim brotherhood in his case) to convince America that keeping him in power was the only option, and so our government obliged him with \$1.3b in military aid every year. Not just the tanks and the fighter planes, even the tear gas and the rubber bullets being used against Egyptians bear the label "Made in America." Only the water in the water cannons presumably comes from the Nile. Is it any wonder that ordinary Egyptians do not quite look upon America as a beacon of freedom and democracy?

In his second State of the Union address on January 25, President Obama equated Tunisian revolution with freedom. "We saw," he said, "that same desire to be free in Tunisia, where the will of the people proved more powerful than the writ of a dictator. And tonight, let us be clear: the United States of America stands with the people of Tunisia, and supports the democratic aspirations of all people."

What a golden opportunity the President missed by not including Egypt in his address! Extolling the virtues of democracy, the President said, "... as contentious and frustrating and messy as our democracy can sometime be, I know there isn't a

person here who would trade places with any other nation on earth. We may have differences in policy, but we all believe in the rights enshrined in our Constitution. We may have different opinions but we believe in the same promise that says this is a place where you can make it if you try. We may have different backgrounds, but we believe in the same dream that says this is a country where anything's possible, no matter who you are, no matter where you come from."

My Egyptian friend Mustafa asked: "Does this mean that the United States reserves the right to experiment with democracy to enjoy its fruits, while Muslim puppets deny democracy to their people to cater to misguided American interests? This is nothing but arrogance and hypocrisy."

American-Muslims, meanwhile, have thrown their full support behind Egyptians fighting unarmed for their freedom. During the Friday sermon in the largest mosque in California's Silicon Valley, for instance, the Imam urged us to pray for their success in overthrowing the pharaoh and preventing dynastic decadence. In solidarity with the Egyptian anger revolution, American Muslims have already demonstrated in San Francisco, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and Boston. More protest marches are planned.

During the Tunisian revolution, President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and his sycophants cut off Internet access, particularly access to Facebook. As reported by Alexis Madrigal of *The Atlantic*, the Facebook security team at its headquarters in Silicon Valley discovered that Ammar, the nickname Tunisians have given to the authorities that censor the Internet, was trying to steal an entire country's worth of passwords. With the stolen passwords, Ammar was deleting Tunisians' Facebook accounts!

After ten days of intensive investigation, Facebook's security team realized that Tunisia's Internet service providers (ISP) were running a malicious piece of code that was recording users' login information when they went to sites like Facebook.

The security team coded a two-step response. First, all Tunisian requests for Facebook were routed to an *https* server. The *https* protocol encrypts the information sent across it (the "s" in "https" stands for "secure" or "secure sockets layer" (SSL), so it is not vulnerable to the keylogging strategy used by the Tunisian ISPs. The second technical solution was a "roadblock" for anyone who had logged out and then back in during the time when the Tunisian malicious code was running.

Facebook rolled out the new solutions to all of Tunisia five days after the company discovered what was happening, and access to the site was restored.

Hosni Mubarak also followed the path of his now-deposed fellow-dictator: He ordered the state-controlled ISPs to completely cut off Egypt's Internet access. But Egyptians were not deterred. The air was charged with electricity and possibilities. The revolution had taken on a momentum of its own, and while Facebook and Twitter initially helped, Egyptians had already transcended the Internet.

Still, it is reasonable to expect that companies like Facebook will give special consideration to activists trying to overthrow repressive regimes. If the company wants to remain central to people's political aspirations, it has to come up with a powerful, long-term solution that can be activated at a moment's notice when access to the site is denied by any country. From a hardware point of view, if dictators block

Internet data pipes into their countries, perhaps multiple satellite connections as backups can be in place so that communication can continue uninterrupted despite latency issues.

However the technology evolves, make no mistake: the days of dictators who equate dissent with treason and oppress and torture their people are coming to an end. Muslim nations are beset by modern-day pharaohs. For the creativity of millions of Muslims to flower in freedom, the pharaohs will be overthrown, if not today, then certainly tomorrow. That is the lesson of Tunisia and Egypt.

(This article first appeared in BDNews24.com:

<http://opinion.bdnews24.com/2011/02/01/young-arabs-have-crossed-the-rubicon/>)

5 February, 2011



VfJ Convener from San Jose, California, Dr. Hasan Zillur Rahim (left), joins the demonstration in San Francisco on 5 February 2011 in support of freedom and democracy in Egypt

Demonstration in Support of Democracy in Egypt

By Hasan Zillur Rahim

Greg Lyons, a Buddhist convert, is in downtown San Francisco on a spring-like day to take part in the demonstration against Egypt's Hosni Mubarak. "Our intentions are

important," he says. "They are the seeds of reality." He is optimistic that people power will prevail in Egypt after decades of dictatorship. "But change must come from within. If America tries to bring about the change that Egyptians are dying for, it will be a disaster. They must do it themselves."

One reason why grassroots revolution is sweeping the Arab world is the enormous income gap between the rich and the poor. "Do you think that kind of class struggle can happen here in the U.S.?" I ask.

"What do you mean can it happen here?" he retorts. "It's already happening! Just look around you, a few blocks from here, and you can see how many Americans have become destitute. We have become one of the most unjust societies in the world."



We chant slogans - 1,000 Americans strong - who have gathered at the United Nations Plaza. "Down, Down, Hosni Mubarak! Yasqut, Yasqut, Hosni Mubarak!"

Jack Kornfield also feels strongly that Egyptians must take control of their own destiny. The soft-spoken person becomes agitated when he talks about how the U.S. may undermine the aspirations of Egyptians. "U.S. has got to stay out. I am confident Egypt will find its own way. People on the streets of Cairo and other cities are smarter than the people in Washington."

Hassan, an Egyptian, is a doctoral student in a California University. He is grateful to Tunisians for showing the way but believes that since Egypt is a bigger and more "critical country," the revolution must succeed in his homeland for other Arab countries to emulate. He wants the new government to stop selling Egyptian land to foreign investors, as Mubarak's government has been doing. "The king and his corrupt cronies fatten their pockets while the poor become poorer!"



"No justice, no peace," exhorts an organizer from the makeshift dais, and we respond in unison.

Farida, a young Egyptian student, narrates how she tried to get her voter card in Cairo last November to vote in the parliamentary elections but was harassed and intimidated at every step of the way. An officer at the police station asked her, "Who are you going to vote for?" Emboldened by a friend who threatened to bring a lawyer, the officer quickly changed his tune and gave her the voting card. But many of her friends got the runaround for weeks until they gave up in frustration. (The election was, as usual, completely rigged by Mubarak and his minions.) These young people have never known anyone other than Mubarak as their ruler. They felt defeated, until they saw what happened in Tunisia. Everyone cheered when Farida said January 25 would be the most important day in the history of modern Egypt.



Muslims, Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, women, men, babies in strollers and veterans in wheelchairs, the young, the old, Imams, Rabbis and Priests filled the Plaza. Colorful signs sprouted everywhere: "Stop U.S. Military Aid to Egypt," "Buddhist, Jews in solidarity with the Muslim and Christian People of Egypt," "Mubarak in De-Nile, Get Out!," "Ali Baba is Gone. What about the Forty Thieves?" "DeNile Ain't Just a River in Egypt," "Dying for Something is Better than Living for Nothing," and many more.

Maryam Bin Salah, a doctoral student from Tunisia asks in wonder: "Just two months ago, could you have dared to dream that two dictators would fall? Why are we ruled by trash in Arab countries? All our thinkers and scholars and engineers are either in exile or in prison. Why? Why are we treated so badly? We must rid our countries of dictators so our inventors and our best minds can return and rebuild our nations."

Imam Abdul Aziz of Sacramento, an Egyptian, asks us to put pressure on the White House to make the right decision. "Just think," he said, "the revolution is raging for the 12th straight day. There is uncertainty, sure, but what is certain is that the brave people of Tunisia and Egypt have already prevailed. All supporters of democracy have prevailed. Even after Mubarak is forced to resign, people will remain in the streets until true democracy rules. We have a chance to become a developed country rather than remain frozen as a third world country."

The Imam chokes with emotion but recovers: "I have a cousin, a young fellow, in Tahrir Square right now. He has never had an aim in life, frittering away his time in frivolous pursuits. I just spoke to him. He told me, 'I will die for my country until we have democracy and rule of law.' The revolution is changing hearts. Some are already swayed by the crocodile tears of Mubarak. 'Give him a chance,' they say. 'The economy will be destroyed. Old people are not getting their pension. The sick are not getting their medicine.' All I can say to them is: Shut up! We have been in prison for 30 years. The thugs have stolen \$70 billion of our money that are now in

the banks in Switzerland and France and England. Egyptians will stay on the streets until their demands are met!"

Tim Paulson, a labor union representative tells the gathering that Americans must learn from Egyptians "so we know how to secure our own rights here in America. We must remain vigilant until Egyptians can live their dreams. Mubarak is only four hours from Saudi Arabia. Enough is enough. Get out!"

Mo, an activist with the Jewish Voice for Peace (<http://www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org>, Israelis and Palestinians. Two people. One Future), tells me: "It is not for presidents and kings to give people their freedom. Freedom is God's gift to people. We must be united together."

"Israel has expressed anxiety about democracy coming to Egypt. Why is that?" I ask. Mo sighs. "Because it is easy," he says, "for Israel to engage in the politics of fear. Israel must act like a country in the Middle East and not as if it is a transplant of the West. It will be good for Israel if democracy comes to Arab countries."

Mo wants the U.S. to do everything it can to let democracy bloom in the Middle East, instead of promoting its candidates in the name of stability. "Jews and Muslims are not separate," he said. "We are united by a common future." He is sure that the last pharaoh will soon go. "Coddling dictators has been the U.S. policy. That has to change. All this talk about the Brotherhood coming to power is a tactic to create anxiety and undermine the revolution of the people."

"O Mubarak can't you see, Time to join Ben Ali." The rhyming slogans are catchy and energizing and make us smile.

More people are pouring in. I realize with a shock that three hours have already passed. When stories and images of oppressed people breaking free from their oppressors grip us, time becomes inconsequential.

People sitting on the fences say that demonstrations, rallies and protest marches don't change anything. What they don't understand is that, at the very least, they change the participants, in subtle and significant ways. Change without can come only from change within.

What Tunisians have achieved, and Egyptians are poised to achieve, is nothing short of miraculous. It's still a long way to freedom and democracy but the first steps have been taken. The least we can do is show them that we are with you, all the way.

13 February 2011

Euphoria in Egypt

By Hasan Zillur Rahim

In just eighteen days, young Egyptians waged a peaceful revolution and brought down the 30-year dictatorship of Hosni Mubarak and his failed police state. Inspired by Tunisians, empowered by social media and emboldened by a fierce yearning for freedom, they tore down the wall of fear and made Egypt free.

"I look at our society with a critical eye and find nothing extraordinary in the people I see," wrote Naguib Mahfouz (1911-2006) during a bleak moment in his life. How the Egyptian Nobel Laureate (Literature, 1988) would have exulted if he could see his people making history in Tahrir Square! They were extraordinary in every way, in their courage and discipline and the way they took control of their destiny without resorting to violence, even though Mubarak's paid goons killed more than 300 of them.

The path to full democracy is long and arduous and there are many uncertainties along the way. The power, after all, has shifted to the Egyptian military. But the armed forces played a positive role in the people's revolution and there is hope that there will soon be a lifting of the state of emergency, the dissolution of the illegitimate People's Assembly and Shura Council, the formation of an independent legal committee to amend the constitution, and the lifting of laws restricting political freedoms so that Egyptians can vote in a free and fair election.

But these uncertainties must not keep us from celebrating the extraordinary achievement of the Egyptians. They have lived in economic and political darkness for decades but in a matter of days, the light from their revolutionary flame raced across the globe and illumined us all. It is not only other Arab and Muslim countries suffering from corrupt governance and plutocracy that can take a cue from Egypt, but also countries like Myanmar and North Korea whose people have been languishing for decades as well. In our connected world, the transition from a Saffron revolution to a Jasmine revolution can occur in an instant.

I gained valuable insight into Egypt's revolution from someone who was there in Tahrir Square during the fateful days. Suhaib Webb (<http://www.suhaibwebb.com/>), an American, is a Muslim scholar who spent seven years studying at Al-Azhar University. He saw firsthand how the young heroes of Tahrir Square transformed stagnant Egypt into a land of hope and possibilities almost overnight.

When Mubarak sent his thugs to terrorize the protesters and their families, including the Cairo neighborhood where Webb lived, he saw Egyptians - secular and religious, poor and middle-class - form cordons around homes and buildings to keep attackers at bay. Seeing how united they were, the thugs withdrew in less than a day.

Webb saw the young knights of Egypt, aimless and despondent only weeks ago and smoking marijuana on streets, transformed into fearless freedom fighters. They visited mosques to seek Allah's help and vowed never to give up until Mubarak resigned. "We have recovered our honor and dignity," they told him. "We have a sense of identity now. We have a purpose in life." Web was reminded of the Quranic verse: *Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change what is in their hearts.* (13:11)

Among Egyptians, Webb found a middle ground between secularism and fanaticism. They were determined to sacrifice themselves before they would even consider sacrificing or hurting others. They were committed to eradicating corruption, poverty and inequality from their society rather than to any grand ideology. The compassion he witnessed between Muslims and Christians moved him. A leading Coptic priest in Cairo asked his congregants to guard mosques during Friday Juma prayers. Likewise, an Imam asked Muslims to protect churches during Sunday services. Webb's

apartment sentry, a Christian, offered to defend him at any cost were he to run into any trouble.

Webb feels that Muslims, particularly American Muslims, should be grateful to Egyptians for the good name they brought to Islam through their non-violent revolution. In March, Republican Congressman Peter King of New York, chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, plans to hold hearings on the radicalization of American Muslims. He claims that American Muslims are prone to violence and cannot be trusted. "Egyptian Muslims have taken the wind out of the sails of Islamophobes like King and the stalwarts of FOX News," said Webb.

But what Suhaib Webb came to realize most strongly during the revolution was that we all have inner Hosni Mubaraks, tyrants within us who oppress our spouses, our children, parents, relatives and subordinates. These inner pharaohs destroy the soul as surely as pharaonic rulers destroy lives. We must defeat our inner demons if we want to change ourselves, because change without can come only from change within.

Although it will take years to put the Egyptian revolution in perspective, several lessons are already clear. Here are a few:

1. If history teaches us only one thing, it is that no one is indispensable. Tragedy occurs because those who deem themselves indispensable become immune to the lessons of history.
 2. A revolution must be organic to succeed. Freedom and democracy cannot be exported or imposed by military might. Eight years after the U.S. invaded Iraq to spread "freedom and democracy" in the Middle East, the country is in ruins and the cost of the war has hit the \$3 *trillion* dollar mark! In contrast, Egyptians brought about their transformation in less than three weeks, a peoples' revolution that was of, by and for Egyptians.
 3. The United States has to rethink its foreign policy. Investing in security at the expense of peoples' right to govern themselves inevitably leads to disaster. As a columnist put it, America must define its foreign policy by the strength of its values, not by the value of its strength.
 4. The days of dictators who suppress the will of the people – Neroes playing flutes while capitals like Tunis or Cairo burn - are numbered. An unforgiving future awaits them. Enslaved people have witnessed how the impossible can become possible when fear gives way to resolve and there is no longer any tolerance for suffering in silence.
 5. The Web is woven into the fabric of modern life and the power of the social media to mobilize people transcends borders and nationalities. Although many young people are web-savvy, there are many more who cannot exploit the power of social media. They can post tweets and share anecdotes with their Facebook friends, but launching a campaign or organizing a demonstration eludes them. All it takes is some practice and a keen sense of trends, keywords and justice. There are hundreds of worthy local causes. Pick one - a fundraiser, a school event, a town-hall meeting - and try to do it over the Internet. You never know when history will beckon.
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<http://opinion.bdnews24.com/2011/02/13/euphoria-in-egypt/>)
