

## GENDER JUSTICE IN THE MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA



Women were at the forefront of the Arab Spring as they called for their rights to be recognised, but many still remain marginalised. The Middle East and North Africa still lags far behind other regions when it comes to the status of women. Oxfam empowers women to take part in decision-making and political life.



**OXFAM**



Overleaf: Women from Oxfam's partner organisation, League of Tunisian Female Electors, protest outside the National Constitutional Assembly for Tunisia to demand that women make up 50% of electoral lists. Photo: Serena Tramonti; Above left: Sarah Jamal Ahmed, a 24-year old sociologist who was one of the activists leading the charge on Change Square in Sana'a, meets with friends in Sana'a to blog and make online connections. Photo: Abbie Trayler-Smith; Above centre: A prisoner at Al-Mansuara prison in Aden. There are around 1,000 women imprisoned in Yemen, mostly because of adultery. Photo: Abbie Trayler Smith; Above right: Huda is the chairwoman of the Yemen Women's Union in Hodeidah, Yemen, and gives classes to women in human rights. Photo: Abbie Trayler Smith

## In the Middle East and North Africa, Oxfam empowers women to have a say in decisions that affect them most.

### Empowering women to participate in political life

Oxfam is empowering thousands of poor and marginalised women to take part in political life, and exercise their rights. Across Morocco, Tunisia, Yemen, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, our partners are helping to support women so they can participate in decision-making. We are also supporting Syrian women who have been affected by the crisis to voice their concerns to decision-makers in the neighbouring countries of Jordan and Lebanon. Alongside this we are building alliances to campaign for policy changes on women's rights so they can participate fully in democratic reforms.

**"THERE IS NOT A LOT OF SPACE AND FREEDOM FOR WOMEN IN POLITICAL PARTIES TO MAKE DECISIONS. I WANTED TO BE INVOLVED WITH SOMETHING THAT HAS THE POWER TO BRING CHANGES. I WANT REAL CHANGE FOR RURAL WOMEN IN TUNISIA, AND TO IMPROVE THEIR LIVING CONDITIONS AND THE SERVICES THEY CAN ACCESS." FATMA BEN SALAM IS PART OF THE LEAGUE OF TUNISIAN FEMALE ELECTORS, ONE OF THE ORGANISATIONS WORKING WITH OXFAM TO INCREASE WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION.**

### Women's access to justice

Oxfam is helping to make sure women are fairly protected by the law in Lebanon, Jordan, and Northern Iraq. We are working with community leaders to raise awareness of the personal status laws governing issues such as marriage and divorce which discriminate against women. Our partners are providing women with legal support and access to lawyers to help them get a fair trial. We are also advocating to improve women's access to legal services and helping to change the attitudes of court officials towards women's legal rights.

**"MY HUSBAND USED TO BEAT ME AND TRIED TO FORCE ME INTO PROSTITUTION. I WANTED TO GET A DIVORCE, BUT DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO. JUSTICE WITHOUT FRONTIERS GAVE ME THE COURAGE TO FILE A LAW SUIT, AND OFFERED ME FREE REPRESENTATION IN COURT. NOW I FEEL SAFE AND ABLE TO LIVE WITHOUT DEPENDING ON MEN." MARIE KHASHAB IS RECEIVING LEGAL SUPPORT FROM OXFAM'S PARTNER, JUSTICE WITHOUT FRONTIERS.**

### Taking part in decision-making

Oxfam works to ensure women play an active role in public life in Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq. Together with our partners, we are supporting individuals to become change makers and shift perceptions and attitudes towards women's rights and increase gender equality. We are also working with local organisations and institutions to build networks and collectively call for women's participation in decision-making.

### Creating a just and equal society

Oxfam is helping to create just and equal societies across the Middle East and North Africa by working with women's organisations, local institutions and the state. We're building the capacity of civil society organisations so that they can engage with the government. This work is helping to bridge the gap between the state and its constituencies.