

“Supporting the leadership role of women inside local government units”

Introduction:

As part of MIFTAH’s strategic goals aimed at making an impact on policies and legislation in order to guarantee civil and social rights for all sectors, and based on its commitment to the principles of good governance, a policy meeting was held which brought together women and social political leaders and youths with members of the PLC’s legal committee. The purpose of the meeting was so women and youth leaders could present their position on the Local Government Units Elections Law regarding lowering the age of candidacy from 25 to 21 and on the Palestinian electoral lists system. This is aimed at broader participation and for more representation of women and youths inside these units, far removed from factionalism and partisanship. The meeting also included the proposition of mechanisms to promote the role of female members of local government units through contact and communication with representatives of Palestinian factions.

The Tunisian and Moroccan cases in Election processes

Morocco: The age of candidacy is set at 23 for the parliament where elections for the 305 members of parliament take place within party lists or coalitions in 92 constituencies. Ninety seats are voted on for in the national list (60 seats for women, and 30 for youths who are less than 40 years of age) on the basis of full proportional representation and the method of the largest residual votes.

Tunisia: The age of candidacy for parliament elections is 23. As for municipal and district elections, the candidacy age is 20. Nominations for municipal and district council membership is one the basis of parity between women and men and the principle of rotation within the list. Furthermore, nominations are put forth on the basis of parity between men and women for the presidency of the party and coalition lists in more than one constituency. Each list must have one male or female candidate that is no more than one year past 35 from among the top three. Lists that do not abide by these conditions are not accepted and chairs are distributed on the basis of full proportional representation and the method of largest residual votes.

Discussion: General framework

- **Local elections:** An important national achievement, to be conducted concomitantly in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. It should be noted that the local elections law, which was ratified by the PLC in 1996, emphasized that elections must be conducted according to the majority system and that the head of the local council is separate from the elections in the council itself. The law was amended in 2004, stipulating that elections for the council head would be carried out by members of the elected town council.
- **The quota system:** Participation of women in elections within the quota system, whereby two seats for women are allocated in every local unit; Women's participation in decision making positions must not be below 50%; The threshold must reflect the street's acceptance of the candidate; support for young women in political action and raising their representation in the quota to 30%; women should be at the top of a consolidated list and not an independent one based on the quota system; striving for a full proportional representation system in the upcoming elections, since it would guarantee a good status for women. It should be noted that women have excelled in some local councils, which calls for shedding light on their innovations and their achievements; not focusing on superficialities and giving women the role they deserve, while preserving the role of political forces in this regard; promoting the leadership role of female members of the various factions, not just in confronting the occupation but in building their society.
- **Elections law:** In August 2005, the PLC passed Elections Law No. 10, of 2005 based on the system of proportional representation. Lists included female candidates in the first five seats of each list. Today, the current elections law allows most local units to make changes to the distribution of posts.
- **Age of candidacy:** Setting the age for candidacy at 25 for general elections, in accordance with the elections law. This is with the knowledge that throughout this year, the elections committee put forth a draft for amendments, the essence of which was to lower the threshold from 8% to 5% and to prohibit the nomination of first-degree relatives in local council elections to prevent corruption. It is also to achieve a mechanism for integrating women. Taking experience into consideration is key in any discussion on lowering the age of candidacy in elections, as is diversity in expertise and combining the experiences of the old and young generations, ultimately lowering the candidacy age to 21.

- **Role of the media:** Reviving the role of the media in shedding light on women's issues and promoting their leadership role; guaranteeing that a curriculum on local government is included in universities; raising the awareness and culture of voters on their freedom of choice and the peaceful transfer of power. It is noteworthy to add that the local media in its current state is very weak and fall short in moving in tandem with women's issues.
- **Role of youth:** Youths are absented from all circles in the Palestinian political system; they do not exceed 0.50% in the public services sector; Youths have a right to demand a political role and representation in their parties and factions and to set up rehabilitative programs for youths that would enable them to reach decision making positions, whether in local councils or in PLC elections. Meanwhile, political parties are called on to promote internal democracy because this strengthens the role of youths and also the parties themselves. Change falls solely on the shoulders of youth given that they are always pioneers of change. That is why focus must be on ideas and thoughts and not on individuals, on calls for comprehensive political and social action that guarantees the participation and active contribution of youths; criticism of the government's policy towards empowering the role of women at a time when the PLC is defunct and while parties are not taking any role towards them.
- **Impact of the division:** Limiting elections to the West Bank alone will only reinforce the division while holding them in Gaza will mean the outcome will be in favor of the party in control in the Strip.
- **Communities themselves will choose the head of the local council rather than the elected members of the council:** Reaffirming the importance and sustainability of the meetings and continued contact between faction representatives and female members in order to promote the role of women and strengthen their role within local councils.
- **Civil society organizations:** Promoting the role of civil society organizations in regards to awareness and social education, both individuals and groups, on the importance of elections and the peaceful transfer of power.

Recommendations:

First: Barring Nominating relatives:

- Pressure towards barring the nomination of first-degree relatives in the same list, which would impact the decision-making mechanism at a later stage; this is considered a major

obstacle to women in terms of their integration in mechanisms for decision-making. The current status quo promotes factionalism.

- Ensuring that democracy is achieved and that women are involved in decision-making in local government units..

Second: Lowering the candidacy age

- Considering experience as fundamental in the discussion on lowering the candidacy age
- Reaffirming the need for a variety of expertise and combining the experiences of the old and young generations.

Third: the women's quota system

- Reaffirming the importance of a women's quota whereby every list should include no less than 30% of women; ratifying this based on the latest Central Council decisions.
- Women must be represented in all decision-making positions by at least 50%.
- There should be a threshold that represents the street's acceptance of the candidate.
- Encouraging young women to engage in political action, with women at the top of the electoral lists.

Fourth: Curricula: Reaffirming the demand to include compulsory local government curriculum in Palestinian universities.

Fifth: the media: Working towards reviving the role of the media in shedding light on the role of women in local units, thereby contributing to a change in stereotypes about women and promoting the role of female leadership members from the various factions.

Sixth: The voter's education: Raising the awareness of voters about their freedom of choice and the peaceful transition of power and increasing voter participation.

Seventh: Open electoral lists: Working towards open lists which would achieve freedom of choice within the list as opposed to the single choice of the head of the list; to provide an opportunity for freedom of choice, including the women on the list.