



**Euro-Mediterranean Foundation of Support
to Human Rights Defenders (EMHRF)**

Sixth Consultation of the Council of Representatives

24 October 2021 - Online

Minutes

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Opening of the sixth consultation of the Council of Representatives

The President of the Euro-Mediterranean Foundation of Support to Human Rights Defenders, Driss El Yazami, and Rina Rosenberg, Adalah's International Advocacy Director who was appointed to chair the consultation, opened the sixth consultation of the Council of Representatives online on 24 October 2021, welcoming all participants.

Board members of the Foundation in attendance also included Christine M. Merkel, Kamel Jendoubi, Habib Nassar and Marc Schade Poulsen.

On the occasion of this opening, Driss El Yazami wished to pay tribute to Michel Tubiana, who recently passed away, and who was, alongside the Board, an architect and a constant supporter of the Foundation since its creation. He took the opportunity to recall that the creation of the Foundation was approved by the members of EuroMed Rights in 2003 following a study conducted by Khémaïs Chammari and Jacob Gammelgaard, which assessed the needs for the protection and support of human rights defenders and associations in the southern Mediterranean region.

Since then, the Foundation has allocated small-scale grants amounting to 17 million euros to financially support defenders and NGOs at risk, NGOs that carry out innovative, sensitive initiatives, aim to develop women's leadership, and operate in isolated regions.

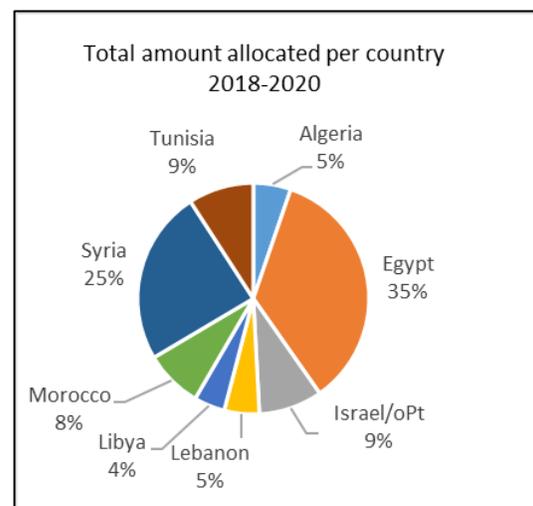
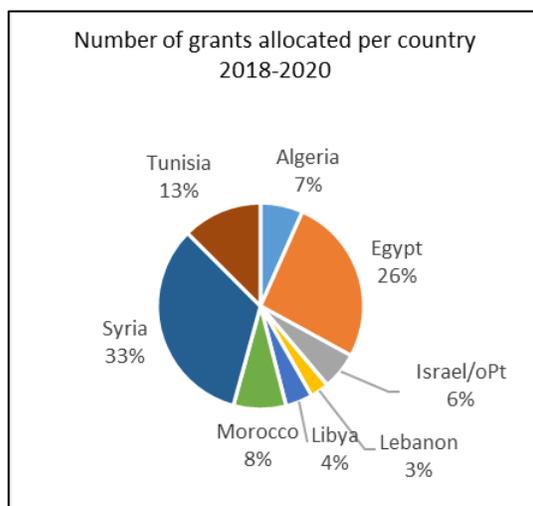
1. Developments in 2018-2020

Driss El Yazami recalled that the Foundation only provides financial support to defenders, groups, and local NGOs and that it does not engage in advocacy and remains discreet about its actions. The EMHRF gives priority to supporting innovative and sensitive initiatives (e.g. on the themes of migration, individual rights, etc.), initiatives led by women, organisations located in countries where foreign funding is prohibited or very difficult to obtain and organisations operating at a distance (outside the capital cities or in the diaspora).

1.1 Key Developments

Some key indicators were presented to the Council of Representatives to give an overview of the evolution of the Foundation's activity.

- Support was granted to protect and sustain the activity of **333 local defenders and civil society actors**, which represents a **29% increase in the Foundation's grant-making capital** compared to 2015-2017.
- The Foundation focused on **young defenders and NGOs (30%)**, **women and LGBT+ people (25%)** and **exiled defenders and migrant associations (25%)**. Moreover, 70% of all beneficiaries were based outside capitals.
- **A broader programme was developed on Egypt (35% of the grant-making capital)**, including tailored coaching for young lawyers and exiled NGOs. **Together with Syria (25%), 60% of the Foundation's interventions focused on these two countries.**
- A study of ways to **strengthen endogenous funding for Tunisian human rights NGOs** was carried out.
- 76% of the Foundation's budget was spent on grants and activities.
- The Secretariat is composed of 11 employees, including 3 new recruits, and the administrative and financial department (2 persons) was entirely renewed.



1.2 Overview of Support Actions by Country

Based on the preliminary documents prepared by the Foundation and send to the members of the Council of Representatives, Driss El Yazami gave an overview of the interventions of the Foundation in each country.

1.1.1 SYRIA: Protecting Defenders' Safety and Empowering Victims in Securing their Rights

In Syria, the Foundation's support focused on protecting 82 individual defenders so that they could escape threats to their lives by relocating to safer areas of the country or to neighbouring countries. In addition, the Foundation supported 34 Syrian civil society initiatives aimed at documenting human rights violations committed by all parties to the conflict, providing assistance and empowering vulnerable populations and victims, including women and youth, IDPs and refugees, to claim their rights and end impunity. The Foundation's grant-making capital to Syrian human rights defenders reached € 1.4 million.

For example, the support allowed the relocation of Syrian defenders from besieged areas (Eastern Ghouta, Yarmouk, Daraa) to avoid arrest. The Foundation also contributed to support the creation of a coalition of 5 victims' organisations that jointly drafted a charter calling for the creation of an international mechanism for truth and justice on enforced disappearances and arbitrary detentions.

1.1.2 EGYPT: Protecting and Upholding the Resilience of the Independent Civil Society

The Foundation's main focus was on supporting the resilience of the independent Egyptian civil society movement, protecting the safety of 40 individual defenders and pro-democracy activists under judicial harassment and assisting 34 human rights organisations to expand local protection networks and protect their very existence and influence, both at home and abroad. The aim was to enable them to continue assisting victims of repression and documenting violations, as well as to develop innovative initiatives, particularly in the areas of media and advocacy, in order to broaden the base of support for the civil society movement at national and international level. The Foundation's grant-making capital to Egyptian human rights defenders reached € 2 million.

For example, support was allocated to key legal aid initiatives and law firms, and the training of young lawyers, to defend independent civil society actors facing unfair indictments and trials. Moreover, it helped strengthening contingency plans, well-being and security training, and strategic retreats for local and exiled defenders and NGOs.

1.1.3 LIBYA: Empowering Grassroots Human Rights Initiatives to Work in Coalitions

The Foundation's interventions were aimed at protecting the safety of 6 individual defenders and supporting 9 emerging Libyan human rights organisations, half of which registered abroad for security reasons, to develop their activities aimed at providing legal assistance to victims of violations, including detained migrants, victims of torture, abduction, and death in custody, documenting violations and

promoting respect for fundamental rights, including the right to freedom of expression. The Foundation's grant-making capital to Libyan human rights defenders reached € 256,000.

For example, support was allocated to individual members of the Libya Platform, in collaboration with the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), to advocate for an international investigation mechanism, and it contributed to the establishment of a platform of 6 local NGOs to protect the rights of migrants and refugees in the country.

1.1.4 ISRAEL-PALESTINE: Protecting Civil Society Action in Defending Palestinian Rights

In Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, the Foundation's main focus has been on supporting 20 human rights organisations to overcome the consequences of the closing civil society space, while addressing ongoing violations of Palestinian rights, including the gender dimension of the occupation, violations of freedom of movement, arbitrary arrests of civil society activists and minors, house raids, land levelling and house demolitions. The Foundation's grant-making capital to Israeli and Palestinian human rights defenders reached € 527,000.

For example, an emphasis was placed on supporting Palestinian women's rights organisations to confront a significant increase in requests for assistance and secure accommodation for women victims of gender-based violence during the pandemic. It also supported Palestinian workers to choose their union and reach a collective agreement to secure respect for their economic and social rights in Israeli companies.

1.1.5 ALGERIA: Protecting Civil Society's Rights to Freedom of Expression, Association and Assembly

The Foundation's support actions focused on protecting the safety of 10 individual defenders and consolidating 11 civil society initiatives, including in the diaspora, to raise awareness of the Hirak's demands for democratic change, to document the judicial repression and provide material and legal representation to prisoners of conscience, and to protect spaces for free expression, especially of young people, in remote areas. The Foundation's grant-making capital to Algerian human rights defenders reached € 312,000.

For example, its support contributed to launching international solidarity and advocacy actions by Algerian civil society actors in the diaspora towards members of the European Parliament to encourage them to call for an immediate end to the repression and the release of all prisoners of conscience. He also supported cultural initiatives led by young people to protect spaces of free expression for Algerian youth, whether through the creation of comics, films, and documentaries, especially in remote areas.

1.1.6 TUNISIA & MOROCCO: Supporting Associations in Addressing Inequalities and Promoting Participatory Democracy

Beyond the differences and complexities of the democratic transition processes underway in each of the two countries, the Foundation prioritised strengthening the core operations of 31 Moroccan and 43 Tunisian associations, 75% of whom operate in isolated regions, in order to address inequalities and empower vulnerable populations, including youth, women, LGBTQ persons, migrants and persons with

disabilities, to assess public policies and participate in the defence and promotion of human rights. In addition, the Foundation supported initiatives to monitor the transition processes and strengthen the implementation of reforms, including the laws to access information and to combat violence against women, while strengthening spaces for debate on human rights and democracy between academics and civil society actors. The Foundation's grant-making capital to Tunisian and Moroccan human rights defenders reached € 1 million, distributed almost evenly.

For example, a key focus was placed on assisting national and local women rights' organisations (39% in Morocco and 21% in Tunisia) in their efforts to document, advocate, alert, assist and monitor the implementation of Moroccan and Tunisian laws n° 103-13 and n°2017-58 aimed at combatting violence against women. It also supported associations in remote areas, using culture and the arts, to empower vulnerable populations to know their rights and participate in assessing public policies in collaboration with the local and central authorities.

1.1.7 LEBANON: Scaling Up Civil Society Support for Vulnerable Populations in Times of Crisis

While mainly supporting innovative human rights initiatives that face financial difficulties, the Foundation increased its support to Lebanese civil society actors in 2020 to ensure that they avoid waning amid an unprecedented economic, financial, and political crisis, compounded by the pandemic and the Beirut Port explosions. The support allocated to 9 NGOs was mainly aimed at addressing the needs of the most affected populations, including youth, LGBTQ persons, persons with disabilities and families of the disappeared, to preserve their memory and empower them to claim their rights. The Foundation's grant-making capital to Lebanese human rights defenders reached € 291,000.

For example, health care, legal counselling, and housing were provided to LGBTQ persons, and social media campaigns launched to support their wellbeing in the past year. The Foundation also supported a new youth-led independent media platform to provide a space for the many voices and demands relayed by the protest movement and to promote inclusive narratives.

1.3 Financial and Organisational Development

The budget of the Foundation amounted to about 8.4 million euros during the period 2018-2020, of which 76% was directly assigned to activity costs and 24% to wages and administration.

The Foundation has thus maintained its policy of capping human resources and administrative costs at one quarter of its operating budget, thus ensuring that the bulk of resources are allocated to support local human rights actors.

The financial results reflect an increase in the needs expressed by defenders in the region, particularly during the Covid-19 crisis, and a controlled growth of the Foundation.

Income	2018		2019		2020		2018-20	
Subsidies								
Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)	406,463	16%	725,333	27%	683,472	22%	1,815,268	22%
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)	365,958	15%	678,377	25%	597,076	19%	1,641,411	20%
Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DAPP)	394,694	16%	316,984	12%	305,328	10%	1,017,006	12%
Sigrid Rausing Trust	222,124	9%	54,882	2%	319,774	10%	596,780	7%
Open Society Foundations	330,154	13%	367,338	14%	311,051	10%	1,008,543	12%
European Commission (EIDHR), Egypt	164,548	7%	171,476	6%	332,881	11%	668,905	8%
European Commission (NEAR), Syria	20,692	1%	0	0%	0	0%	20,692	0.2%
European Commission (NEAR), Libya	132,618	5%	0	0%	0	0%	132,618	2%
European Commission, EU HRDs Mechanism	223,359	9%	222,704	8%	383,407	12%	829,470	10%
United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute	166,687	7%	0	0%	0	0%	166,687	2%
Rockefeller Brothers Fund	40,813	2%	0	0%	67,735	2%	108,548	1%
National Endowment for Democracy	44,457	2%	52,499	2%	46,624	1%	143,580	2%
French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Syria	0	0%	77,708	3%	118,298	4%	196,006	2%
Support granted from provisions	5,000	0.2%	5,000	0.2%	0	0%	10,000	0.1%
Total Subsidies taken to income	2,517,567	100%	2,672,301	100%	3,165,647	100%	8,355,514	100%
Expenses								
Actions in Support of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs)								
Urgent grants to HRDs and NGOs	323,963	13%	254,816	10%	332,980	11%	911,759	11%
Operational grants to NGOs	1,433,579	57%	1,498,162	56%	1,972,842	63%	4,904,583	59%
Financial costs related to grant giving	7,254	0.3%	10,482	0.4%	15,132	0.5%	32,868	0.4%
Follow-up on the situation of HRDs	11,914	0.5%	8,978	0.3%	3,056	0.1%	23,948	0.3%
Board meetings	52,286	2%	63,331	2%	11,364	0.4%	126,981	2%
Tailored Coaching Egyptian NGOs	0	0%	74,299	3%	0	0%	74,299	1%
Discussion seminars and Committee meetings (Egypt)	0	0%	43,336	2%	11,885	0.4%	55,221	1%
Meetings with partners (incl. fundraising)	14,875	1%	5,098	0.2%	122	0.004%	20,095	0.2%
Consultation of the Council of Representatives	27,527	1%	0	%	0	0%	27,527	0.3%
Sub-total Actions in Support of Human Rights Defenders	1,871,398	74%	1,958,503	73%	2,347,381	75%	6,177,282	74%
Other Services related to the activities								
Membership fees to Foundations' Networks	10,358	0.4%	5,435	0.2%	3,825	0.1%	19,618	0.2%
Temporary Consultation/Research	19,660	1%	4,392	0.2%	1,000	0.03%	25,052	0.3%
Translations	25,331	1%	34,242	1%	31,816	1%	91,389	1%
Other Expenses/Services related to activities	0	0%	6,945	0.3%	0	0%	6,945	0.1%
Information, Publication	2,080	0.1%	537	0.02%	2,475	0.1%	5,092	0.1%
Sub-total Other Services related to the activities	57,429	2%	51,551	2%	39,116	1%	148,096	2%
Staff wages								
Programme staff	302,612	12%	347,199	13%	393,608	13%	1,043,419	13%
Technical staff	148,574	6%	155,111	6%	198,818	6%	502,503	6%
In-house accountant/external consultants	553	0.02%	28,534	1%	41,361	1%	70,448	1%
Sub-total Staff wages	451,739	18%	530,843	20%	633,788	20%	1,616,370	19%
Administrative expenses								
Audit	19,498	1%	24,567	1%	24,948	1%	69,013	1%
Maintenance of a secure forum and website	4,278	0.2%	5,037	0.2%	210	0.01%	9,525	0.1%
IT Support	23,855	1%	19,077	1%	17,223	1%	60,155	1%
Rent	49,376	2%	36,981	1%	39,972	1%	126,329	2%
Office expenses and stationary	9,790	0.4%	18,256	1%	17,972	1%	46,018	1%
Bank and transfer fees	4,792	0.2%	2,130	0.1%	4,333	0.1%	11,255	0.1%
Others	25,416	1%	25,355	1%	18,456	1%	69,227	1%
Sub-total Administrative expenses	137,005	5%	131,403	5%	123,113	4%	391,522	5%
Financial items								
Financial income and expenses	4	0%	0	0%	0	0%	4	0%
Tax	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Sub-total Financial items	4	0%	0	0%	0	0%	4	0%
Total Expenses	2,517,567	100%	2,672,301	100%	3,143,398	100%	8,333,266	100%
Operating Profit								
Operating Profit	0	0%	0	0%	22,249	1%	22,248	0%

* This document presents a summary of the audited financial reports for the years 2018, 2019 and 2020, as published on www.emhrf.org.

2. Objectives for the Future

Driss El Yazami concluded the presentation with some objectives and future perspectives:

- The Foundation hopes to maintain a budget of around 3 million euros per year given the overall negative trends in terms of human rights funding allocated to the region. In particular, it is experiencing difficulties with some partners who have traditionally supported it but are changing direction. The Foundation also wishes to control its growth and diversify its sources of funding to avoid dependence.
- The Foundation will aim to maintain and strengthen, as far as possible, support in the area of equality, as this is a fundamental and ongoing concern.
- Beyond providing financial assistance, the Foundation will continue to provide human rights defenders and organisations with tailored advice and referrals to other organisations to develop their collaborations, and capacities to develop coping strategies, as well as to maintain and strengthen their access to financial resources.
- It intends to continue the work and deepen the research carried out on the issue of endogenous funding of civil society actors. A study and recommendations were finalised on this subject in 2020 but further discussions were interrupted due to the Covid-19 outbreak. It is fundamental that human rights NGOs be able to receive funding internally (from local/national sources) and not only from abroad (international sources) to reduce their dependence on foreign funding. This study on Tunisia should be replicated and extended to other countries in the region.
- Finally, Driss El Yazami conveyed the willingness of the members to renew the Board in order to inject new and young energy.

3. Discussion with the Council of Representatives

As chair of the consultation, Rina Rosenberg opened the discussion with the Council of Representatives on the Foundation's main activities, its finances and future orientations following the presentation.

Several representatives expressed their deep appreciation for the work accomplished. They notably emphasised the Foundation's remarkable work and the relevance of the actors supported in Syria and Algeria. They also urged the Foundation to keep up the good work in these difficult contexts.

3.1 Structure

To the question of clarifying the structure, the President introduced the other members of the Board who make all decisions on the grants and orientations of the Foundation. They include Khémaïs Chammari who was the main architect behind the creation of the Foundation, Kamel Jendoubi, Souhayr Belhassen, Leila Rhiwi who works for UN Women in Morocco, Hanny Megally who is one of the UN experts on Syria, Bassma Kodmani who has played an important role in the negotiations on Syria, Bahey Eldin Hassan, Habib Nassar, Marc Shade-Poulsen, Lynn Welchman and Christine Merkel. He then thanked the young and dynamic team that accompanies the Board. He added that the Board meets every 6 months, and that the next meeting will be held in Paris in November 2021. The President announced the forthcoming renewal of the Board and informed that a new President could be present at the next General Assembly.

3.2 Audit

The President also wished to inform the Council of Representatives that the Board had decided to rotate the Foundation's auditors in October 2020 after a competitive procedure. As Deloitte had been auditing the Foundation for more than 10 years, the Board appointed BDO as the external auditor in accordance with International Standards on Auditing and the additional requirements applicable in Denmark.

3.3 Strengthening exchanges on common priorities

The President acknowledged the seriousness of the current universal human rights crisis, as seen in Poland and Hungary and other countries around the world that were traditionally supportive of human rights but are now changing direction. This crisis is affecting the region, which is why it is imperative to adapt in order to strengthen the work of human rights actors and the Foundation. He stressed the need to reflect on new issues, such as the link between the digital world and human rights and added that it is essential to rethink and renew the way actors work, including ourselves. He agreed with the members of the Council of Representatives that it would be useful to enrich the reflection on the Foundation's actions according to priority themes, such as the impact of the fight against terrorism on defenders, the fight against gender-based violence, and to organise moments of joint reflection with EuroMed Rights and its members by establishing working groups on common priorities, such as on the issue of funding for example.

3.4 Resourcing the human rights movement

Finally, the President recalled that the funding of associations was already a provision contested by several Arab countries in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders adopted in 1998. Today, some countries,

including in Northern Europe, that used to support the protection of defenders are changing their priorities. There is a need to gather new support and partners, and to think of new ways to raise funds to continue to support defenders in the region. The endogenous funding project of the Foundation is one of the ideas that could help reduce dependence on foreign donors and thus increase the autonomy of the associations. The study on this subject carried out in Tunisia will be published soon and its conclusions will be shared with the members of the Council of Representatives. The President also noted the recommendation to share the Foundation's good practices, particularly in the area of funding.

Closing of the sixth consultation of the Council of Representatives

Following the discussions, Driss El Yazami and Rina Rosenberg brought the sixth consultation of the Council of Representatives to an end, thanking all the participants for their constructive and helpful questions and contributions.

They added that the best way to pay tribute to Michel Tubiana is to continue to fight for human rights and they looked forward to seeing everyone in person as soon as possible.
