

For Immediate Release



## **AUB's Asfari Institute for Civil Society and citizenship to hold inaugural conference on new spaces of civil society activism in Arab world**

Beirut, Lebanon- 20/05/2012 - The Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship is organizing its inaugural two-day conference on Thursday and Friday May 23-24, 2013 / 8:30 am to 5:00 pm at the American University of Beirut, College Hall, B1 Auditorium.

Entitled “New Spaces of Civil Society Activism in the Arab World,” the conference is held in partnership with the Arab Studies Consortium (Center for Contemporary Arab Studies at Georgetown University, Arab Studies Institute at George Mason University) and Legal Agenda Beirut.

The goals of this conference are:

- To start a rigorous engagement with matters of civic participation and citizenship;
- To interrogate the impact of civil society on the changing region;
- To trace the most promising prospects for rights-based advocacy.

The conference revolves around presentations and panel sessions by more than 25 invited practitioners, academics and activists from many countries

Conference Program ([Click here](#))

### **Conference Concept Note**

Durable authoritarianism in the Arab world has been shaken by political revolutions across the region. Starting in Tunisia in December 2010 and spreading quickly to Egypt and beyond the outbreak of mass protest movements was seemingly sudden, they reflect longer histories of civil society mobilizations. The existence of older and more conventional kinds of institutions, such as labor unions, political parties, and social welfare organizations, was critical to adding discipline, legitimacy and a history of activism into the mix of spontaneous protests. The ongoing revolts have produced new actors and spaces, and they certainly demonstrate the popular unwillingness to accept a status quo ante.

These mass protests were animated above all by demands for political and civil rights, respect and dignity, and opposition to corruption and economic exploitation. The underlying and unifying sentiment of these protests was a demand for state reform and for more robust means of civic engagement and participation. Even in countries where there have been regime changes, the struggles continue because people's demands and expectations have yet

to be satisfied. The objective of this conference is to air and analyze how changes over the last two years are reconfiguring the boundaries of state and society and the meaning of citizenship.

We are bringing together practitioners, academics and activists from many countries to interrogate the impact of political transformations and social changes on the region. Among the issues we invite participants to examine and explain are: how conceptions of citizenship are being (re)formulated in terms of rights claims and the politics of inclusion and exclusion; how constitutions in particular and the law in general have constituted terrains of struggle; how alliances and/or conflicts are framed through and mobilized around gender, sexuality, generation, class, rural-urban divides, and communitarian and sectarian identities; how popular culture and social media have contributed to and reflected collective mobilizations; how protests have been affected by war, militarization, and securitization, including in some places counter-revolutionary repression; and how the protests have produced various kinds of regional and transnational interferences as well as solidarities across borders.

As the launching event for the new Asfari Institute, we hope the conference can initiate productive engagements about these matters and serve as a platform for future work.

ENDS

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**Note to Editors**

**About AUB**

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 600 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,000 students. AUB currently offers more than 100 programs leading to the bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full service 420-bed hospital.

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