



Issam Fares Institute for Public  
Policy and International Affairs

معهد عصام فارس للسياسات  
والشؤون الدولية

## PRESS RELEASE

### SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE ARAB WORLD SINCE 2010: CHANGING CONDITIONS, MOBILIZATIONS AND POLICIES

#### **Two-Day Conference on February 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> organized by AUB's Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, and the Mamdouha S. Bobst Center for Peace and Justice at Princeton University**

The conference commenced with introductory speeches given by Dr. Tarek Mitri, Director of AUB's Issam Fares Institute, Dr. Amaney Jamal, Director of the Mamdouha S. Bobst Center for Peace and Justice at Princeton University, as well as Ms. Leila Kabalan, Program Coordinator of the Social Justice and Development Policy in the Arab World Program at the Issam Fares Institute. They highlighted the opportunities emerging from the collaboration of AUB's Issam Fares Institute and Princeton University in facilitating dialogue. Dr. Mitri identified "a real deficit in forward-looking thinking" and expressed his "hope that our conference facilitates forward looking thinking."

AUB President Fadlo R. Khuri gave a keynote speech in which he discussed "The University as a Model for a Fair and Just Society". In his speech, President Khuri emphasized that universities can serve as micro-models of society as a whole by mirroring their challenges and strengths. President Khuri noted that AUB in particular plays a significant role in the development of education, political consciousness, and medical and business leadership for Lebanon and the Arab world, as it has done for over 150 years. Universities would need to take on their role "in achieving social justice in society", by, among others, fostering student activism, gender equality, and social inclusion. AUB actively pursues these goals, for example with the launch of a major fundraising campaign that aims to increase the scholarship opportunities at AUB for disadvantaged students, striving to make the university accessible to all. Concluding, President Khuri stressed that AUB and its students shall help erase sectarianism and to create a more tolerant society in Lebanon.

In another distinguished lecture, Dr. Stephen Macedo, Laurance S. Rockefeller Professor of Politics at Princeton University discussed the traditions of thought about social justice and democracy in creating a legitimate and cooperative social order. In particular, he interrogated Western models of constitutional democracy and the extent to which they furnish standards for political legitimacy globally. He stressed that the distribution of the gains from globalization to all will be a crucial matter and of benefit to the United States, as well as to the Arab nations, in legitimizing political representation.

After Dr. Macedo's speech, the first panel commenced with presentations by Prof. Nisreen Salti, Associate Professor of Economics at AUB, Dr. Heath Prince, researcher at the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Prof. Ghada Barsoum, Assistant Professor at the American University in

Cairo, and Dr. David Mednicoff, director of the faculty for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. Dr. Salti scrutinized the underlying determinants of mass mobilizations during the Arab Spring and emphasized the literature on the reasons for Arab uprisings to be messy, and at times even contradicting. By evaluating explanations of the origins of the popular uprisings, she finds the patterns of grievances across countries to have varied to an extent that it has been “diffusion processes, rather than a common set of concerns” that fueled the uprisings.

Thereafter, Dr. Prince analyzed the policy options and choices for tackling youth unemployment in ‘Arab Spring countries’ after 2011. Among others, he concluded that “no major changes in youth unemployment can be expected following the current policy prescriptions by international organizations.”

Dr. Barsoum talked about Active Labor Market Programs in Egypt, which are designed to target the high levels of youth-unemployment. She concluded that the legacy of protective policies and particularly the “fragmented multiplicity of players” constrain the effectiveness of these programs. Implementation modalities would “reveal significant shortcomings of program coordination and related activities, leading to suboptimal institutionalization of the programs” themselves. Dr. Mednicoff concluded the first panel by discussing the link between legal actors and sociopolitical change in the Arab Gulf countries. He emphasized the central role of legal actors in facilitating the states’ growth and ability to balance the political system and social pressures.

The second panel included presentations on “Polls, Data, and Changing Attitudes from the Arab Region”. Among others, Dr. Michael Robbins, Project Director at Arab Barometer, raised the question why Jordanians prefer Shia over Sunni refugees. He finds that fears about extremist ideologies influence considerations of ordinary citizens more than sectarian prejudices. He noted that “being Shia” would send a powerful signal that a refugee is not a member of any terror organization.

Dr. Amaney Jamal, Director of the Bobst Center for Peace and Justice, and Professor of Politics at Princeton University, concluded the first conference day with a distinguished lecture about one of the most contentious contemporary topics, “Trump’s Presidency: Islamophobia and the Middle East”. In discussing the challenges and opportunities that arise from his election, she noted that President Trump appears to be ‘unhinged’ by being ‘occupied in fighting battles’ rather than working on or according to long-term strategies. In giving an outlook on the role of US policies, she concludes that the United States are and will remain a ‘key fundamental player’ in the Middle East for the foreseeable future. Moreover, she stressed that the inclusion of Muslim communities is the key for tackling populist movements, both in the US and Europe.

Two panel discussions followed on Gender Activism and Case Studies from the Region, as well as Institutional, Political, and Social Changes in Post-Revolution Egypt. Among others, Daniel Tavana, PhD Candidate at Princeton University, raised the question whether “Egypt wants change?” In discussing the implicit attitudes towards the authoritarian regime, Mr. Tavana revealed that Mr. Sisi might hold a deeper reservoir of popular support than is conventionally assumed.