

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT



FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES  
Department of Political Studies and Public Administration

CORDIALLY INVITES YOU TO A BROWN BAG LECTURE

# Law, Democracy and the Arab Spring?

By David Beatty

**Date:** Tuesday, January 10, 2012.

**Location:** Auditorium C, West Hall

**Time:** 6.00-7.00pm

**Abstract:** The Arab Spring that is sweeping through North Africa and the Middle East has the same ambition as all political revolutions in human history: replacing oppressive and corrupt rulers with Governments that are guided by principles of social justice and that respect people's basic human rights. Ever since the fall of the Bastille, revolutionaries have faced the dilemma of making sure they do not replace the repressive and autocratic regime they seek to overthrow with a new tyranny of a democratic majority. So too in the Arab world today there is a real concern that fundamentalist Islamist parties will gain control of the Government and build theocratic states like Iran or Saudi Arabia. To ensure a successful transition to Governments that will treat everyone with equal concern and respect, revolutionaries all over the world have increasingly turned to their judges. Over the course of the last 50 years judges have become front line defenders of legitimacy and integrity in Government. Incorporating a process of judicial review into their law making process was the path followed by the Eastern Europeans after the collapse of the Soviet Empire in 1989, by South American countries escaping military dictatorships and by the South Africans at the end of Apartheid.

After a brief introduction into the ways judges have exercised their powers of review I propose that the discussion focus on whether this model of constitutional democracy is suited to the Arab world. Is it, for example, compatible with Islamic law? How well can it accommodate the conflicting ambitions of religious leaders, secularists and the military? Why has the rule of law had so little traction in the region in the past? What, if anything, makes the current assertion of power by the people any different?

**Biography:** Dr David Beatty is Emeritus Professor of Law at the University of Toronto/Canada.