Tunisia’s Constitution Enriched by Women’s Wisdom

Meherzia Labidi Maïza spent the beginning of her life largely out of the public eye, studying in France and later working in Tunisia as a translator and raising her three children. With the rising of the Arab Spring, Labidi-Maïza was elected to the Tunisian Constituent Assembly as a representative of Tunisians living abroad of the Ennahda Movement, a “Muslim democratic” party. She was soon elected First Deputy Speaker of the Assembly, making her the senior-most elected woman in the Middle East. In this capacity, she led the drafting of Tunisia’s constitution. As one of the senior members of Ennahda, Mme. Labidi Maïza made important contributions by urging for dialogue and compromise to keep the country on track toward democracy.

For more than 30 years, Mme. Labidi Maïza has been involved in mediating conflicts and bringing wars to an end. “I learnt from Religions for Peace (RfP) that our task is to establish the conditions for dialogue,” says Labidi Maïza. “We give people the opportunity to talk to each other, even if they aren’t really able to talk to each other!”

Today, in her capacities as a Member of Parliament and as Co-President of RfP, she aims to make adversarial groups, parties or even entire religions aware and work towards the common good. She is also a prominent representative of RfP’s Women of Faith Network in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), which includes women of faith from Sunni, Shia, Christian, Jewish and other traditions committed to serving as a high-level multi-religious mechanism for advocacy and action to resolve conflict, advance sustainable development and protect the environment in the region and internationally.

As a deeply religious woman, she finds conflicts related to faith offensive. "Every religion, of course, carries the potential for committing violence. But they also have a different potential: That of peaceful coexistence and humanity," she stated, considering it her personal mission to unleash this other potential harbored within each religion.

“Building peace is a sensitive process. You need patience, perseverance and sometimes, to not be too visible—but to be discreet. This, women can do. We can be the cement that holds society together.”