

# Note by the Editors

We are very pleased to present the fourth issue of the *Journal of Constitutional Law in the Middle East and North Africa* (JCL-MENA) titled “Arab Constitutional Responses to the Revolutions and Transformations in the Region.” JCL-MENA is a double-blind peer-reviewed bilingual journal managed and edited by the Arab Association of Constitutional Law (AACL). This special edition of the Journal is published jointly with the Legitimacy and Civicness in the Arab World research project at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), with the support of the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

2011 was an exceptional year in the Arab world. The Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions that broke out that year were successful in ousting the presidents of both countries while barely witnessing any violence. The winds of change spread quickly across the region. Popular protests erupted in several countries, beginning with Libya and Syria. While these were met with violent repression by the regimes in place, elsewhere, governments moved swiftly to preempt calls for revolution by enacting a number of constitutional amendments, as was the case in Morocco or Jordan, for instance.

There is no doubt that the events that the countries of the region witnessed in the context of what became known as the “Arab Spring” were not random, nor did they come out of nowhere. Rather, the underlying factors that drove them had been unfolding for decades: the suppression of freedoms, the lack of social justice, and repressive security policies all contributed to the implosion.

The slogans raised differed, as did the chants, but the demands that were voiced by millions of Arab men and women all pointed in the direction of the “constitution”. Dignity, equality, social justice and the end of tyranny are necessarily linked to the principles upon which the state operates. Long ignored as irrelevant at best, constitutions became centre stage. Be it because they had originally been designed to limit the power of the people rather than the state, or because the way they were implemented had left a big gap between constitutional promises and actual practice, the response to the series of protests that swept the region was to turn to those constitutions. Within two years between 2011 and 2012, seven new constitutions, including three interim ones, were written in six Arab countries, which is exactly the number of new and interim constitutions written in the Arab world in the ten years before 2011.

However, constitutional reactions varied. In some countries like Syria, the response was the adoption of a new top-down constitution whose failure to end the crisis was followed by an internationally mandated constitutional process that is yet to produce any results despite more than four years of meetings. In others, like Tunisia, the process of drafting a new constitution appeared to be more inclusive and consultative, yet the political events that followed left many open questions. In Yemen and Libya, on-off constitutional drafting processes developed amid violent conflict and political instability. In some other countries like Jordan and Morocco, pre-emptive top-down constitutional changes were quickly introduced after the first signs of public unrest. Still, constitutions in some countries, like Lebanon, remained immune to any change despite waves of public unrest.