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Views: The Human Rights Movement, Covid-19, and the Challenges of a Critical Juncture

Slaheddine Jourchi

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There is abundant cause for more far-reaching research on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on rights and freedoms, which are in particular jeopardy in the Middle East and North Africa region. Regimes and governments must take action, lead the response to the pandemic, and work to reassure their citizens. But human rights organisations and democracy advocates fear that governments, especially in authoritarian states, will exploit the pandemic to curb freedoms and consolidate state control of the public sphere. Governments are taking advantage of the public's panic, which makes the populace more willing to comply with official policies in the hope that they can stop this deadly pandemic—a willingness demonstrated by the acceptance of most preventive measures by the majority of citizens.

A citizenry is typically forced to rely on its government, even if it was not chosen in free and fair elections. Yet, such governments are responsible for administering society's affairs simply by virtue of their hold on power, not because of the legitimacy derived from the free will of the people.¹ The authoritarian state is attempting to make a comeback on the wings of this looming threat to health by playing the role of protector. What are the expected challenges and implications for individuals and groups, specifically for the future of the human rights movement in the region?

Has the World Entered a New Pandemic Phase?

There are some in scientific circles who assert that the world has entered a new phase of globalised epidemics.² As the world has become more economically integrated and culturally open thanks to means of communication, mobility, and technological and scientific development, it has allowed epidemics to move much more rapidly than in the past. Border closures, the expanse of seas and oceans, and self-imposed lockdowns or blockades by powerful states are no longer effective tools for containing deadly epidemics. A dangerous virus appearing anywhere can spread rapidly via human travellers and within a few days become a regional epidemic or global pandemic that

ravages rich and poor peoples alike and makes no distinctions based on colour or race. Taking everyone by surprise, this new, dangerous development has already begun to bring changes in lifestyles, policies, and relations between individuals and countries, and these changes are likely to grow more profound and far-reaching.

Neither the West nor East can seal the borders to isolate and protect their countries during pandemics. Covid-19 appeared in China, but it has spread to most countries of the world, including the United States.³ As the virus crossed borders and spanned distances, it demonstrated the impotence of nation states and exposed their limitations and weaknesses. Under the pandemic, European states are no longer able to secure a healthy future without considering the conditions of their neighbours in the southern Mediterranean or Africa. For the first time, they have a common destiny and a single healthy future,⁴ despite their disparate capacities, sizes, and wealth and their different agendas, calculations, and priorities, and despite the Europe's insistence on monopolising the sources of its power and maintaining policies of hegemony and expansion. The danger has become mutual.

This new situation presupposes serious, wide-ranging inter-state cooperation, which requires a tangible change in how the two parties discuss and negotiate cooperation and coordination plans to ensure a global victory in the war against Covid-19. A more visionary discourse could evolve and the nature of relations between the two parties change, but this requires two basic conditions: first, the West must abandon its excessive selfishness and accept the principle of partnership, and second, representatives of the South must shed their dependency complex and make themselves actual partners in policymaking on more than one level and in more than one field.

Achieving positive, lasting results in disease control in Europe must be coupled with similar efforts in countries of the South. But this seems unlikely in the current global order, which is based on deepening the North-South imbalance and cementing a hub-periphery policy in international relations. In addition, the nationalist state is resurgent in Europe, where local sympathies have triumphed over the EU project, a tendency magnified as member states sensed the risks of Covid-19 and prioritised the interests of their own populaces over the rest.⁵

Expanding the Ranks of the Poor

The hoped-for cooperation between North and South should not stop with health, but extend to other no less important areas. The World Bank's estimates are alarming. Its experts predict that the Covid-19 pandemic 'could push about 49 million people into extreme poverty in 2020'. The poor will be more vulnerable to social shocks because of where they live and work, with workers in the informal service likely to feel the initial impacts most severely. This is plainly evident in many Arab countries, including Tunisia, where workers in the parallel market and informal sector put their lives at risk because, they say, they have no choice. The World Bank adds, 'As a result, many of the new poor will likely be found in cities, while rural areas, which tend to be poorer to start with, will experience a deterioration in living conditions and a deepening of poverty'.⁶ In this context, one example is sufficient to demonstrate the magnitude of the crisis in the Arab world. In

Libya, which collapsed completely after the overthrow of the Qaddafi regime, the director of the Centre for Social Studies at the Ministry of Social Affairs affirmed that ‘45 per cent of Libyan families live below the poverty line.’⁷

It is thus apparent that the poor are paying a heavy price because of the pandemic. While it is true that Covid-19 does not distinguish between people, groups, and regions—the heads of powerful states like US President Donald Trump and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson have been infected with the virus, along with dozens of senior politicians, wealthy people, artists, athletes, and celebrities—there are objective factors that make vulnerable groups more susceptible to infection than other groups whose better economic conditions make them better able to confront the virus.

Experts agree that until Covid-19 vaccines are proven effective, we must make do with preventive measures such as mask-wearing and social distancing to protect ourselves, especially in case of infection.⁸ In this, an individual’s social status plays an essential role.⁹ Proper nutrition guarantees the necessary vitamins; a clean environment and open spaces support compliance with social distancing and promote exercise; a private car saves its owner from overcrowded mass transit, which is likely to help prevent the transmission of the virus.¹⁰ But within impoverished communities such preventive measures often cannot be practiced, and a close look at the conditions of the Arab world reveals that the ranks of the poor are growing.¹¹

Women’s Conditions during the Pandemic

Women in the Arab world live in vulnerable situations and lack many of their basic rights. The Arab Women Organization issued a statement summarising the most important risks and challenges facing Arab women in many countries during the pandemic. Addressing the economic impacts, the organisation said that the crisis would ‘push more poor women into the irregular labour market as a result of layoffs due to the recession, and the proportion of women who are the breadwinners for their families will increase’. This is in addition to ‘the negative impact of the crisis on female small business owners, who are already struggling in a difficult competitive environment and without adequate support and funding, in addition to female workers in the irregular market’. The statement focused as well on the situation of displaced and refugee women who lack the requisite hygienic environment. This problem is especially grave in the Arab world, considering the disaster that has befallen the Syrian people.¹²

The Covid-19 crisis has an additional serious implication for women, as revealed by the Ministry of Women in Tunisia, which confirmed that the rate of violence against women increased seven-fold during the comprehensive lockdown in the first wave of the pandemic. This alarming, shocking number clearly points to a silent struggle underway within many families and the transformation of homes into spaces for the practice of male violence against women.¹³

Authoritarian Opportunism

Covid-19 offered an important opportunity for the state, particularly the authoritarian state, to regain the initiative and tighten its grip on the levers of power and society.¹⁴ Real democracy limits the state and compels it to use means other than repression to regulate public affairs. It deprives governments of the opportunity for unilateral decision-making, interference in the private lives of individuals and groups, and the imposition of policies absent discussion and deliberation by citizens. Precisely for these reasons, many governments, even in democratic countries, have tried to take advantage of the pandemic to tighten their grip on political, economic, and even health decision-making. In an article for *Foreign Policy*, Anwar Mhajne and Crystal Whetstone described these attempts as ‘the rise of Covid dictatorships’, asserting, ‘Around the world, emergency powers are chipping away at democracy—sometimes with public support’. They add, ‘The pandemic has been used to justify surveillance policies and bypass checks and balances, some of which have been met with approval from a public rallying around the flag’.

When the virus spread and its severity was confirmed, governments began searching for the most effective means to confront it. China, where the virus first appeared, managed to contain it according to its official agencies and sources, though some doubt this narrative. Although China is an emerging superpower, it still rejects democratisation. What makes the Chinese experience especially significant is that it was able—after some painful revisions—to build state capitalism without democracy. That is, it separated capitalist production from its political system, in contrast to Europe and the US, thereby remaining a strong, centralised, authoritarian state. Though it does not believe in freedoms or human rights, it nevertheless achieved an economic breakthrough thanks to the subjugation of hundreds of millions of people to an overpowering central authority. When the pandemic spread beyond China, many governments took measures similar to those enacted by Beijing, most importantly a comprehensive lockdown, backed up by police and even military forces. Taking China as a model, these governments shut down major cities in their entirety, exercising complete control of social and economic life without strong opposition from the populace, with the exception of activists in some countries, though their impact was limited.

The lockdowns helped governments control the first wave of the pandemic, but the economic cost was catastrophic.¹⁵ As the second wave approached, politicians began looking for an approach other than the Chinese one, fearing economic collapse and open rebellion by the public.

The governments of the developing world, including Arab countries, could not hold out for long. If even strong capitalist countries felt the severity of the sudden, violent, pandemic-induced economic crisis, weak countries with limited income and wealth felt it much more acutely. Nevertheless, many regimes tried, and are still trying, to take advantage of the pandemic by limiting individual and collective freedoms, cracking down on political opponents and democracy advocates, using the army and police to enforce curfews, and prohibiting political and other assemblies. They have also tightened control of official and private media, placed additional restrictions on civil society organisations, and postponed measures in support of democratic

freedoms, ostensibly because they are occupied with the pandemic. Many governments have also taken advantage of curfews and lockdowns to more closely surveil and contain dissidents.¹⁶

These decisions were made and implemented without objections from political activists and civil society forces, for one very powerful reason: fear of the repercussions of Covid-19. It was this fear that prompted Algerians to suspend their yearlong popular movement before achieving all of their goals, in particular the break with the old regime and the removal of the army from politics. This does not mean that the protest movement they launched failed. On the contrary, the movement altered the political landscape, forcing President Bouteflika to resign and withdraw from politics, sending dozens of former senior officials to prison, and imposing a minimum level of freedoms. Nevertheless, the pandemic derailed the movement. The same is true in Lebanon, where Covid-19 brought an end to the massive protest movement that erupted all over the country and had persisted for many months. The revolutionaries' fear of the spread of infection, in addition to the declining strength of the movement for various reasons, led them to stop taking to the streets, which enabled the executive to regain control of the public sphere.

Discourse of Economic and Social Rights Makes a Powerful Return

Human rights are a single, indivisible system, no part of which can be sacrificed for another. Although the International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights were issued by the United Nations the same year, the struggle for their adoption, and the particularities and needs they invoked, differed, as did the backgrounds of the governments that advocated for them.

Informed elites in Arab countries prioritised the expansion of freedoms and the consolidation of political rights, demanding human rights—especially freedom of expression and belief, freedom of assembly and demonstration, and freedom of association—as a necessary prelude to the construction of democratic systems. This required, and still does, great efforts, sacrifices, and much time. On the other hand, some regimes—holding the banner of the welfare state—sought to contain democratic activists and forces, marginalising their demands and arguing that basic rights are citizens' right to food, work, education, and health. These regimes highlighted their achievements in these areas to underscore their leadership status, showing that they alone could provide real services to citizens.

Today under Covid-19, most Arab peoples have found that they lack most of these rights, be they political, economic, or social. Regimes' response to the demands of democratic elites remained tepid, but at the same time they pursued ineffective economic policies and paths, gradually abandoning the slogans they once championed. In turn, social disparities widened and millions were deprived of basic rights, which helped erode individual and group immunity in the new pandemic age, making Arab populations more vulnerable and fragile. When people sought refuge and protection in the state, it posed a dilemma for the latter, which found itself unable to fulfil the obligations for which it was established. The crisis currently afflicting the authoritarian state during the spread of the coronavirus is a complex, multi-faceted one. Each time these tattered

regimes try to use the overwhelming health crisis to consolidate and perpetuate their rule, they are disoriented, finding themselves unable to protect their citizens and minimise casualties. Consequently, these regimes face a growing legitimacy crisis due to their self-inflicted deterioration and weak financial capacities.

Nevertheless, the current crisis has provided an opportunity for a newly enriched discussion of the relationship between civil and political rights and economic and social rights, offering a chance to correct the previous error of prioritising the political over the social dimension. Rights are indivisible, and in a climate rife with poverty, unemployment, disease, and stark social disparities between individuals and groups, political freedoms are emptied of their meaning and content. Now more than ever, human rights activists must be cognizant of major policies and choices that address the causes of poverty and deprivation, and they must establish mechanisms to fight poverty in line with empirical standards that approach actual social justice. Activists should also engage with unions and social movements with the aim of improving health conditions, resisting high drug costs and monopolies, reforming social security systems, and seriously addressing the division of the health system into one health sector for the poor and another for the rich. This does not entail the abolition of the private health sector, but it imposes the duty to improve the conditions and services of public hospitals and finance them well in order to provide basic services for all.

No Concession on Civil and Political Rights

States and governments, particularly those with an authoritarian bent, do not seem ready to engage, even on a relative basis, with the demands of activists and democracy advocates during this difficult pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic put most Arab states, already weak and brittle, in an unprecedented predicament, the dimensions of which were evident in their muddled and largely improvised decisions. In many cases, these governments are making errors likely to enrage population groups previously uninvolved in any initiative related to freedoms and human rights. These governments also found they were unable to singlehandedly fulfil their various duties towards their citizens, prompting them to seek the help of civil society and thus make concessions, even partial, to elites and activists. For example, in Tunisia, the spread of the pandemic forced the government to listen to doctors and enable them to participate effectively in the war on the virus given their knowledge of this pandemic. Doctors' representatives in the Scientific Body were allowed to participate in meetings of the Supreme Committee for National Security, which brings together senior state officials and security and military personnel. While the status of most Arab doctors diverged from the Tunisian case, their role at this stage was essential, and in many cases governments and state institutions took the recommendations of health personnel for the sake of the public interest. This in itself is a gain that highlights the importance of cementing the principle of participatory decision- and policymaking. In addition, oversight institutions in some societies helped to protect basic rights and prevented a setback in the democratic transition. In this context, several organisations, including Arab organisations, urged the International Monetary Fund to set conditions for the provision of financial aid to governments in order to ensure transparency and

the sound disposition of funds. Specifically, they called on the IMF to require that governments ‘commit to respecting the rights of civil society groups and repeal or amend laws that prevent groups from safely monitoring government action’.¹⁷

In Tunisia, for example, a widespread controversy erupted when the Fakhfakh government (before its fall) sought permission to issue exceptional decrees that would allow it to take rapid action in vital, priority areas—social, economic, health-related, and especially security—to address the threat of the pandemic, without recourse to parliament, in order to bypass the prolonged legislative process. In view of the seriousness of the situation, the Assembly of Representatives met and approved the measure, though it attaching numerous controls—for example, limiting the use of the authorisation law to a maximum of two months—out of fear that the new law would lead to an expansion of the executive branch’s powers at the expense of the parliament’s oversight and legislative authority, and that this expansion and encroachment could extend beyond the two-month period specified by the law. The opposition argued that the law might nullify the separation of powers and open the door to erosions of freedoms and rights during quarantine periods.

In the context of the crackdown on the press and journalists,¹⁸ UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet decried governments using the pandemic ‘as a pretext to restrict access to information and curb freedom of expression and the right to criticize’. She explained that maintaining a free flow of information is vital in the efforts to fight the pandemic, stressing that the positions and statements of some political officials around the world ‘have created an environment hostile to the safety of journalists and affected their ability to do their work’.¹⁹

The Arab Human Rights Movement at a Crossroads

The Arab human rights movement today is at a crossroads due to on-going global and local transformations, which makes it incumbent on it to shift its priorities, alter its work methods, and change its plans. In light of the pandemic, the right to life is of the highest priority, and this can only be guaranteed by taking a close look at the health sector, which is in a state of collapse in many Arab countries as a result of years of neglect and lack of attention and reform. The deteriorating health situation in Arab countries has become a priority for human rights organisations. The right to health has assumed the utmost importance, especially in Arab societies that lack the minimum level of protection.

The focus of today’s conversation is now biosecurity. What is happening in Yemen, for example, heralds a terrible catastrophe. The images coming out of the country suggest that it has returned to the nineteenth century. The war inflicted extensive damage to health sector infrastructure. Were it not for some hospitals continuing to receive patients and the suspension of military operations by Saudi Arabia, the outcome would have been even more tragic. In such a climate, how can the human rights movement perform its role? How can it even minimally protect victims of war, hunger, and complete health collapse while it is beset by chaos and a pandemic

amid a collapsing state? Community organisations in general, and human rights organisations in particular, are operating in a difficult, lethal climate.

Human rights organisations around the world, especially in Arab countries, face many challenges, foremost of which is financial. With the pandemic, donor institutions have reduced their budgets or reoriented their priorities and goals towards anti-pandemic projects at the expense of other vital concerns that occupied activists throughout the previous phase. This has prompted some organisations to reconsider their agendas in order to survive, while other organisations were compelled to suspend operations pending incoming support. Only self-financing organisations or groups able to reallocate financial savings based on their needs were spared the repercussions of this crisis. Another challenge is that the authorities are targeting human rights organisations on an almost daily basis in many countries. While not a new development, it has become more intense and far-reaching during the pandemic. When governments exploit dangerous health conditions to harass activists and dissidents, protecting and supporting them becomes more difficult because the public is preoccupied with the virus and the shaky economy.

Irregular migration, or clandestine immigration, most starkly demonstrates the nation state's impotence and inability to end its people's suffering. Despite the spread of Covid-19 all over the Mediterranean Basin and the attempts of the Italian and Spanish authorities to prevent 'burners'²⁰ from reaching their shores, irregular migration continued to trend upwards, as youth from most Arab and African countries, especially Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, continued to make their way north.²¹ What is remarkable is the increasing migration by entire families or women with children,²² which often puts them at risk of mass death at sea. The countries of the Mediterranean Basin are still unable to develop new policies to defuse, or at least mitigate, this dire humanitarian crisis.

If the defence of political prisoners was a priority for human rights organisations before the pandemic, today it has become even more urgent. Most prisoners are at risk of infection, and they must be protected regardless of the nature of the crimes they committed. Even so, prisoners of conscience and political detainees are a distinct category. These are individuals who were arbitrarily arrested and detained because of their opinions and opposition to their governments, simply because they disagreed about how to manage the country's affairs. In reprisal for daring to disobey their rulers, they were persecuted and deprived of their freedom.

In March 2020, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed grave concern about overcrowding in prisons, where many people are held in unsanitary, unhealthy conditions. Citing the risk of the virus 'rampaging' through the prison population, she urged the release of as many prisoners as possible to limit the spread of Covid-19.²³ Some Arab and Islamic governments responded to these concerns by releasing some prisoners, but in spite of the critical prison conditions noted by human rights organisations, they excluded political prisoners. The Arab world is rife with prisons that do not meet international standards, such as Kadhimiya in Iraq, Tora in Egypt, Jaw in Bahrain, Burj al-Roumi in Tunisia, Roumieh in Lebanon, Quneitra in Morocco, and Palmyra in Syria.²⁴

The Environment under Threat and Humanity's Future in Jeopardy

Rights movements can no longer dismiss the profound environmental crisis as a secondary issue, especially in light of the global threat of the Covid-19 pandemic. Governments around the world made the unique decision to put entire populations under quarantine. This allowed the earth to breathe a bit for the first time since the Industrial Revolution, which put an end to feudalism and made the machine, and technology in general, a powerful weapon for restructuring the world. Humans have waged a fierce war against nature, exhausting its resources, redrawing its maps, extinguishing hundreds of species, and polluting its vital spaces. But global and local capitalism exerted enormous pressures to bring the comprehensive quarantine policy to an end, prioritising economic interests over health and humanitarian considerations, and the machinery of industrial production thus resumed its destruction of nature. Nevertheless, this exceptionally rare pause offered an opportunity to contemplate the danger of continuing to deplete natural resources and pollute the earth with mountains of waste. Many countries are working hard to find non-polluting, alternative energies, but the US and its allies are leading a counter-offensive to defend the profit-based status quo.

Today, the Arab human rights movement can no longer afford to disregard global developments in scientific research, given that its findings are intimately linked—philosophically, medically, and economically—to human existence and human rights. The emergence of Covid-19 spurred a growing discussion of biological warfare, making the issue an important challenge for human rights thought. Experiments conducted in several laboratories around the world demonstrate the lethal stakes involved and the serious danger to human life and immune systems. Those accusing Chinese circles of creating the coronavirus, despite the lack of conclusive evidence for their claims, are relying on the tools of this war they are preparing to face. The major countries that monopolise the medical sciences are in a frenzied race for a Covid-19 vaccine, and their efforts are not governed solely by humanitarian considerations; they are also motivated by governments and large interests that have invested huge sums to achieve multiple strategic objectives.

At the same time, some doctors and experts are campaigning against Covid-19 vaccines currently under development, arguing that they could have genetic effects. Osteopath Carrie Madej, for example, believes, 'Covid-19 vaccines are designed to make us into genetically modified organisms'. Despite objections to such claims,²⁵ the controversy continues. Although the arguments advanced by these scientists lack proof, the debate reflects the fears raised by some experts.²⁶ The future of the world is imperilled, and the human rights movement cannot ignore any issue that affects and threatens human existence. Scientific research is, or should be, an important source of human rights thought.

The Arab and international human rights movement is at a dangerous juncture due to the severe disruption arising from the Covid-19 pandemic, which has impacted the health conditions of the majority of the earth's population while also throwing the global and regional economy into recession. In this article, I have focused on the serious implications of the pandemic for the poor and women, as well as for the political structure of Arab societies, which are still in thrall to

authoritarian regimes that monopolise power and wealth and are attempting to circumvent the small gains achieved in the field of freedoms and human rights. The paper also spotlighted the multiple challenges facing the Arab and international human rights movement in light of the shifts engendered by Covid-19 and other factors, which raise new issues requiring attention.

About the Author

Slaheddine Jurchi is a Tunisian writer and thinker with interest in topic of rights, freedoms, and Islamic Left.

¹ Al Jazeera Centre for Studies (2020) 'Ma ba'd Waba' Kufid-19: Ayy 'Alam Yumkin Tawaqqu'uhu?' [Post Covid-19: What Kind of World Can We Expect?], 13 April, accessed 1 December 2020, <https://studies.aljazeera.net/ar/article/4644>. The essay states, 'During the harsh months of the crisis, peoples placed their trust in the state to protect them from imminent danger', adding, 'the institution of the state emerges from periods of crisis stronger and better able to control and govern. In turn, the people's reliance on it grows as they increasingly seek its protection in times of imminent crisis, war, and threat'.

² SMT Studies Centre (2020) 'Kuruna wa 'Awlamat al-Firusat: 'An al-Amrad al-Mu'diya wa Tada'iyatiha' [Covid-19 and the Globalization of Viruses: On Infectious Diseases and Their Implications], 18 March, accessed 1 December 2020, <https://bit.ly/2KeMRDS>. The study states, 'The terrifying, spectacular transmission of viruses due to the ease of movement and travel has made the "globalization of viruses" a reality that has moved from the pages of science fiction to today's world, as viruses are no longer geographically isolated'.

³ Youm7 (2020) 'Ta'arraf 'ala Tartib al-Duwal fi Qa'imat Isabat Kuruna: Amrika al-Ula wa Misr fi-l-Martaba 46 'Alamiyan' [Discover State Rankings in Coronavirus Infections: US Ranked First, Egypt Ranked 46 in World], 27 October, accessed 1 December 2020, <https://cleanuri.com/vmw6Aw>.

⁴ United Nations (2020) 'The Virtues of Multilateralism and Diplomacy', 24 April, accessed 1 December 2020, <https://www.un.org/en/observances/Multilateralism-for-Peace-day>. UN Secretary-General António Guterres said, 'The COVID-19 pandemic is a tragic reminder of how deeply connected we are. The virus knows no borders and is a quintessential global challenge. Combatting it requires us to work together as one human family...Crucially, we need to draw the appropriate lessons about the vulnerabilities and inequalities the virus has laid bare'.

⁵ Hassan, Emad (2020) 'Hal Yufakkik Firus Kuruna al-Ittihad al-Urubi wa Yaqdi 'ala Hilm al-Wihda al-'Arabiya?' [Will Covid-19 Break up the EU and Kill the Dream of Arab Unity?], *Deutsche Welle*, 27 March, accessed 1 December 2020, <https://cleanuri.com/pzX1Zl>.

⁶ Sánchez-Páramo, Carolina (2020) 'Covid-19 Will Hit the Poor the Hardest. Here's What We Can Do about It', *World Bank Blogs*, 23 April, accessed 1 December 2020, <https://bit.ly/3qJBi8D>.

⁷ al-Khamisi, Ahmed (2019) 'al-Tabaqa al-Wusta Tatalasha: 45% min al-Usar al-Libiya Ta'ish taht Khatt al-Faqr' [The Middle Class is Disappearing: 45% of Libyan Families Live below the Poverty Line], *Al Wasat Newspaper*, 9 March, accessed 1 December 2020, alwasat.ly/news/libya/238164.

⁸ The World Health Organization recommends the continued reliance on preventive measures even after vaccination. For more details see the WHO website, www.who.int.

⁹ Shanses, Khadia (2020) 'Taqwiyat al-Mana'a Awwal Silah li-Muwajahat al-Waba'' [Strengthening Immunity Is the Best Weapon against the Epidemic], *Andalou Agency*, 7 April, accessed 1 December 2020, cleanuri.com/JYrA3Y.

¹⁰ The conditions laid out on the WHO website could not be applied on public transport in the Arab world. For the conditions, see www.who.int.

¹¹ Majdi, Karim (2018) 'al-Faqr fi-l-'Alam al-'Arabi: Arqam Sadima' [Poverty in the Arab World: Shocking Numbers], *al-Hurra*, 16 December, accessed 1 December 2020, cleanuri.com/bb0W3n. According to a World Bank report, 'In Yemen, 12.8 million people, or 48.6 per cent of the population, live under the poverty line. In Gaza and the

West Bank, it is 29.2 per cent, while in Egypt, 26.1 million people live under the poverty line, or 27.8 per cent of the population. The figure is 18.9 per cent of the population in Iraq, 15.2 per cent in Tunisia, and 14.4 per cent in Jordan. Finally in Morocco, it is 4.8 per cent’.

¹² Arab Women Organization’s statement on the coronavirus crisis, arabwomenorg.org/Landing.aspx?ID=36.

¹³ Bursaidi, Naziha (2020) ‘Tada’uf 7 Marrat bi-Sabab al-Kuruna: Inha’ al-’Unf didd al-Mar’a Awlawiya Quswa’ [Seven-Fold Increase Because of Covid-19: Ending Violence against Women is a Top Priority], *al-Chourouk*, 12 April, accessed 1 December 2020, www.alchourouk.com/node/107850.

¹⁴ Mhajne, Anwar, and Crystal Whetstone (2020) ‘The Rise of the Covid Dictatorships’, *Foreign Policy*, 16 October, accessed 1 December 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/10/16/the-rise-of-the-covid-dictatorships/>.

¹⁵ Gopinath, Gita (2020) ‘Limiting the Economic Fallout of the Coronavirus with Large Targeted Policies’, *IMF Blog*, 9 March, accessed 1 December 2020, <https://bit.ly/3oHWOIW>.

¹⁶ Hussein, Mohieddin (2020) ‘Duwal ‘Arabiya Tastaghill Azmat Kuruna li-Qam’ al-Hurriyat’ [Arab Countries Exploit Covid Crisis to Suppress Liberties], *Deutsche Welle*, 25 June, accessed 1 December 2020, <https://p.dw.com/p/3eKVx>. The article quotes the UN High Commission on Human Rights saying that some governments are using Covid-19 emergency laws ‘to crush dissent, control the populace, and prolong their stay in power’.

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch (2020) ‘IMF: Empower Civic Groups against Covid-19 Corruption’, 4 May, accessed 1 December 2020, <https://bit.ly/3qGphRo>.

¹⁸ Hussein, Mohieddin (2020).

¹⁹ Al-Muhafiz, Jamal (2020) ‘Fi-l-Yawm al-’Alami li-Hurriyat al-Sahafa: Kuruna wa Qanun Shabakat al-Tawasul Yamassan bi-Hurriyat al-Ta’bir wa Yuhaddidan al-I’lam al-Maghribi’ [On International Freedom of Press Day: Covid and Social Media Law Infringing Free Expression and Threat to Moroccan Media], 3 May, *al-Quds al-Arabi*, accessed 1 December 2020, <https://cleanuri.com/4E1pwO>. According to the article, ‘The International Press Institute has documented 130 alleged violations of the media rights since the beginning of the spread of Covid-19, and about 40 journalists have been arrested for publishing reports critical of anti-Covid measures. In addition, there have been more than 50 cases in which access to information was restricted, and there is an increase in censorship and fake news’; see also Khalaf, Mohammed (2020) ‘al-Sahafa al-Mustaqilla wa Hurriyat al-Ta’bir Awwal Dahiyat Kuruna’ [Independent Press and Free Expression First Coronavirus Victim], *Daraj*, 13 May, accessed 1 December 2020, <https://daraj.com/46458/>. The article reports the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers as saying, ‘The pandemic has put the independent press on the front lines of the fight, insofar as it provides accurate information and confirmed news that saves human lives, especially in countries where the authorities are reluctant or have delayed taking timely actions’. It adds, ‘Independent journalism is of vital importance to everyone and every individual, regardless of whether the world is facing public crises and disasters, because its role is focused on the defense of social interests and making us understand the nature of the decisions made to confront various events and developments’.

²⁰ A Tunisian term for illegal migrants, who burn their identity cards as soon as they reach the Italian coast.

²¹ al-Arab (2020) ‘Kuruna Yuwassi’ Da’irat al-Halimin bi-l-Hijra min al-Maghrib al-’Arabi’ [Covid-19 Expands Ranks of Those Dreaming of Emigrating from Arab North Africa], 16 October, accessed 1 December 2020, <https://cleanuri.com/EP2Adb>.

²² Arqoubi, Anis (2020) ‘al-Harqa Maladhan li-’A’ilat Tunisiya Arhaqaha al-Rukud wa-l-Azma al-Siyasiya’ [Harqa Is a Haven for Tunisian Families Exhausted by Recession and Political Crisis], *Noon Post*, 24 July, accessed 1 December 2020.

²³ UN News (2020) ‘UN Rights Chief Urges Quick Action by Governments to Prevent Devastating Impact of COVID-19 in Places of Detention’, 25 March, accessed 1 December 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/03/1060252>. The commissioner said, ‘Governments should release every person detained without sufficient legal basis’, including political prisoners and prisoners of conscience. Upon release, the commissioner said that they should be medically screened, with measures taken to ensure they receive care and follow-up, if needed.

²⁴ Raseef 22 (2016) ‘Aswa’ al-Sujun fi-l-’Alam al-’Arabi Sum’atan’ [The Most Notorious Prisons in the Arab World], 21 August, accessed 1 December 2020, <https://raseef22.net/article/1504-prisons-with-the-worst-reputation-in-the-arab-world>.

²⁵ Goodman, Jack, and Flora Carmichael (2020) ‘Coronavirus: False and Misleading Claims about Vaccines Debunked’, *BBC*, 25 July, accessed 1 December 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/53525002>.

²⁶ Al Jazeera (2020) ‘Sa’a li-Man’ihi min Muda’afat Muhtamila: Istiqalat Kabir Atibba’ al-Sidriya fi Rusiya bi-Sabab Makhatir Liqah Kuruna’ [He Tried to Stop It and Warn of Potential Complications: Resignation of Senior Respiratory Physician in Russia Because of Risk of Covid Vaccine], 14 August, accessed 1 December 2020, <https://cleanuri.com/jVDXBb>.