ISSN: 2788-8037
Publication details, including guidelines for submissions:
https://rowaq.cihrs.org/submissions/?lang=en

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To cite this article: Hassan, Bahey eldin. 2026. "Views: What Does It Mean to Defend Human Rights in an Age that Normalises Colonial Tendencies and Authoritarianism?." *Rowaq Arabi* 31 (1): 10-21, https://doi.org/10.53833/TJZI8797.

Views: What Does It Mean to Defend Human Rights in an Age that Normalises Colonial Tendencies and Authoritarianism?

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Keywords: Value of Freedom; Colonialism; Arab World; Political Culture; Social Contract

The fog of pessimism now shrouding the world may be the heaviest in the seventy-seven years since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was proclaimed on 10 December 1948. For two consecutive years, a war of extermination and starvation has raged in Gaza, resulting in the death of more than 70,000 Palestinians. International institutions have been powerless to stop it, just as they were powerless to stop the genocidal war in Sudan. Predating the catastrophe in Gaza, that war was launched by local actors and backed by Arab parties who exploit ethnic divisions much like foreign colonialists did before them.[1] The international community similarly is unable to stem the Russian invasion of Ukraine, now in its fifth year, just as it has proven incapable of recovering Ukrainian territories seized by Russia twelve years ago. Indeed, the latest American mediation initiative would require Ukraine to cede to Russia additional territory still under its control, an area of 2,500 square miles that includes two major cities. The Trump administration's indulgence of President Vladimir Putin's expansionist ambitions[2] is consistent with its own ambitions to seize Greenland from Denmark, annex Canada and Iceland, and kidnap the Venezuelan president and control his country's oil exports. It's no wonder that France anticipates war between Russia and Europe within three or four years. In light of the Israeli-American aggression against Iran this year, and earlier against Venezuela, it appears that the world no longer is no longer governed by any legal order at all.[3]

The collapse of the international order did not start with Trump. It began more than two decades ago, with the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on 11 September 2001 and the subsequent American invasion of Iraq, despite the UN Security Council's refusal to sanction the invasion and strong opposition from two of America's key allies, France and Germany. Last year, friction between the United States and Europe intensified once more over issues like the two-state solution for Palestine, the International Criminal Court, Trump's trade wars, Venezuela and Greenland, and the stance on Russian expansionism in Ukraine.

While the situation before 9/11 was not ideal, since then there has been a precipitous decline in respect for the international community's rules and resolutions on armed conflict and human rights. At the same time, the world has witnessed democratic backsliding, the rise of authoritarian regimes and far right populism in several countries, and ever more frequent military coups, particularly in Africa and the Arab world.

The end of the Second World War saw the formation of the rules-based international order, the United Nations, and the international human rights system. Over the rest of the twentieth century, dozens of countries in the Global South were liberated from colonialism while the second and third waves of democratisation swept over countries in Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Africa. The Arab world, however, remained untouched by these two later waves, to say nothing of the first wave of democratisation in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

A False Dawn

The absence of democracy and freedom in the Arab world became starkly apparent during the two years of genocide and starvation in Gaza. People in Western countries demonstrated their collective solidarity and protested the complicity of their governments, with hundreds of thousands turning out every week in numerous capitals, major and minor cities, universities, and cultural and artistic festivals—and with the active participation of their Jewish compatriots, particularly in the United States—in a display of international solidarity 'unparalleled in modern history.'[4] In contrast, people in most Arab countries failed to translate their individual feelings of grief over the Palestinian tragedy into collective political action in support of Gaza. In Egypt, those who dared to take to the streets were arrested and jailed for two years before even being brought to trial.

This paradox revived the historical question that has echoed throughout the Arab world in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, after it awoke from the darkness of the Ottoman-Mamluk era to the shock of the extent of Western progress: 'Why did they progress, and why did we fall behind?' The irony was compounded by the fact that Western nations have taken the lead in expressing political and moral solidarity with the Palestinian cause, which the majority of Arab political and cultural elites consider their primary cause. This has revealed the profound impotence of these elites, both to themselves and to the world.

While analyses commonly attribute every manifestation of backwardness in the Arab world to Arab ethnicity and the religion of Islam, the inability of the majority of Arab populations to express political solidarity with the Palestinian people cannot be explained by Arabness or Islam, which are, on the contrary, powerful drivers of solidarity with fellow Arabs and Muslims.

The roots of the problem lie elsewhere, then, in the development of societies and states and even more so in the devaluation of freedom by contemporary political and cultural elites in the region, as clearly evidenced by an examination of the trajectories of the so-called Arab Spring.

Many observers pinned their hopes on the two waves of the Arab Spring (2011–2021)—which initially spread over Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Morocco, and later Iraq, Lebanon, Algeria, and Sudan—as a potential fourth global wave of democratic transition. This

proved to be a false dawn, as it became apparent that political societies in the Arab world could not rally a cohesive, critical mass around a consensus-based approach in any of the eleven countries. Among political elites, freedom as a value lost ground to other issues. Varying from one country to another, these included secularism or Islam, the improvement of living conditions, an unease with an uncertain and unclear future and new actors, and a perception of growing external threats (real or imagined). The wave ultimately receded, leaving in its place the old order (in Iraq, Lebanon, Algeria, Bahrain, and Morocco), or giving way to a military coup (Egypt), a constitutional coup (Tunisia), an armed conflict that led to the division of the state into two or more regions (Yemen and Libya), a civil war (Syria), or a military coup followed by a civil war among the coup's architects (Sudan). Other Arab states played influential, though varying, roles in pushing the two Arab Spring waves along this failed path in all these countries, save Algeria and Morocco.

Efforts to throw off occupation have fared no better. Over the past three decades, Palestinian political elites have failed to form a united front with a shared strategic vision, despite regional and international mediation initiatives led by Egypt, Qatar, Algeria, Russia, and China. This failure persisted during two years of genocidal war, during which the Palestinian Authority and Hamas separately negotiated with Israel and President Trump on several occasions, with each faction reaching agreements or understandings that were adhered to by both parties, for the most part. Even so, the two main Palestinian factions remain unable, as of this writing, to agree on a practical plan for managing and rebuilding the devastated Gaza Strip, or even to agree to sit face to face in the same room in Egypt, which is acting as a mediator. In this context, it seems logical for Palestinians to demand that the 'political reconstruction of Palestinian politics and governance'[5] take priority over efforts to rebuild Gaza, which may yet be turned into a 'real estate colony' or a Gazan Riviera, according to statements by Trump's advisors at this year's Davos Forum.

An important contributing factor to this collective failure in the context of the Arab Spring and Palestine is the relative lack of consensus among political and cultural elites in the Arab world around the priority of the value of freedom, compared to peoples who began to undergo this experiment nearly two centuries ago. As I said above, this has nothing to do with race or religion, but rather the historical development of societies and states, in which political, economic, and cultural elites play a key role.

It is instructive to consider the impact of the different choices made by political elites in unified Korea, which led to the emergence of two entirely different states bound together only by the characteristics of their people. North Korea is an insular, totalitarian, communist state, even more so than Mao Zedong's China, enshrining patriarchal Asian values and worshipping a single leader from the country's founding family. South Korea, on the other hand, rose to become a major industrial power and democratic nation after its political elite rejected patriarchal values. Last year, it even impeached the president on suspicion of plotting a constitutional coup and subsequently referred him to trial ending in his sentencing to life in prison.

From the Arab world, Egypt offers another case study, but this one illustrating the transformation of political elites in the same state over time. In the second half of the nineteenth

century, Egypt began to awaken from the slumber of the Mamluk and Ottoman eras, experiencing an economic, cultural, political, social, and educational renaissance. The British invasion and occupation of Egypt in 1882 failed to hold back this rising tide and force Egypt back into hibernation. Indeed, the Egyptian revolution of March 1919 compelled the British to recognise Egypt's right to independence. It is noteworthy that the Wafd Party, which spearheaded the struggle for national liberation, was a bastion of political liberalism in Egypt and the Arab world. In the second half of the twentieth century, however, Egypt reversed course, though the Egyptian people's ethnic origins and religions remained unchanged. The answer, then, lies elsewhere: in the shifting values of political and cultural elites.

The individual, too, can play a unique, influential role, both positive and negative, in the development of nations, and sometimes even in the course of the world. Consider people like Hitler, Stalin, Lee Kuan Yew, and Trump, as well as non-political individuals like Newton, Einstein, Galileo, Freud, and Darwin.

A Man Named Gamal Abdel Nasser

Following liberation from foreign colonialism, many countries in the Global South focused on internal development, prioritising economic growth and strengthening social cohesion. In parallel, they sought to avoid exhausting the burgeoning state's limited resources in violent internal conflicts or regional conflicts with neighbouring states.

India is exemplary here. After nearly 200 years of British occupation, India prioritised these objectives, granting economic and political freedoms to its citizens, preventing Muslim demands for an independent state (now Pakistan) from turning into a zero-sum conflict, and ensuring that military tensions with its powerful neighbour, China, did not lead to a war of economic and human attrition. India (population 1.4 billion) is now the world's fifth largest economy, surpassing Britain, and ranks 38th on the Global Innovation Index. It has faced setbacks, of course, like many countries around the world, but it has not reversed its upward trajectory since independence.

In contrast, Egypt's path in the last five years to the top ranks of the world's beggar states was paved early on, in the days following the military coup of 23 July 1952, laid down by the agenda set by the leader of the coup, Gamal Abdel Nasser, whose top priority was consolidating one-man rule. This led to:

a) The gradual elimination of the president and members of the Revolutionary Command Council, effected by conspiring against them and followed by imprisonment, exile, or early retirement. This precipitated escalating cycles of bloody conflict between the two remaining members: President Gamal Abdel Nasser and Minister of Defence Abdel Hakim Amer. Unfortunately, the conflict, which gradually intensified over some fifteen years, was not resolved until the army and Egypt suffered a devastating military defeat in the early hours of 5 June 1967, followed by the suicide/assassination of the defence minister.

b) The abolition of political parties and the imposition of a single political framework on Egyptians—the National Union, later the Arab Socialist Union—managed by the security apparatus. This entailed orchestrating show trials of prominent Wafd Party leaders (which seamlessly blended individual and societal political liberation with national liberation), and arresting leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood and communist organisations and subjecting them to the vilest kinds of torture.

c) The abolition of the Egyptian Feminist Union, security forces' interference in labour unions, and the execution of two workers (Mustafa al-Khamis and Mohammed al-Baqri) for leading a labour strike in Kafr al-Dawwar, one of Egypt's smallest cities; other union leaders were bribed to organise demonstrations in March 1954 rejecting a return to democracy,[6] and mass political purges were launched, targeting independent figures in journalism, culture, thought, universities, and the judiciary (the notorious 'Massacre of the Judges').

d) The development of a governing regime based on a social contract that offered bread in exchange for relinquishing freedom, a form of political subjugation. The country's wealth was concentrated in the hands of the new rulers through nationalisation, confiscation, and restriction of the freedom of potential economic actors, on the grounds that they were all 'exploiters'. Wages and incomes of the lower classes were raised to broaden the social base for autocratic rule, but at the same time, senior positions in the civil service and the nascent public sector were reserved for military personnel and civilian cronies who supported the July regime and collaborated with its security apparatus, regardless of whether they possessed even the minimum competence and qualifications needed to assume these governing positions in the day-to-day administration of Egypt, its economy, and its army. The result is well known: the failure of the state's first five-year plan, the spread of corruption, and the laying of the groundwork for the defeat of 5 June 1967.

Most Arab rulers from the Atlantic to the Gulf replicated the Nasserist social contract, though with distinct characteristics in each country. The most significant difference was the vast disparity between the cost of accepting the relinquishment of freedom in most oil-rich states and in most other Arab states. During the Arab Spring, 'common slogans focused on bread, dignity, and freedom. These demands centred more on clear outcomes than on the political system that would provide them.'[7] Presidents—those who remained in power after the Arab Spring or their successors—did not stint on promises of concrete results. But because no different political system was put in place that could turn these promises into sustainable realities, the promises evaporated. The rulers' ability to provide not only freedom - but even bread and dignity - diminished, as strikingly exemplified by Tunisia's Kais Saied and Egypt's Abdel Fattah El-Sisi.

Although Nasser commonly began his public political speeches to Egyptians with the phrase 'O citizens,' he never meant it; in fact, he privately mocked the idea that citizens

were fit for any political role.[8] In his view, Egyptians had never been worthy of freedom, dignity, and equality. After he ousted his rivals, every policy of his regime was aimed at deifying himself and avoiding accountability, including his speech on 9 June 1967, in which he refused to take responsibility for the worst military defeat in modern Egyptian history. Despite his disastrous failure, a year later he did not hesitate to order the air force to bomb a student protest in Alexandria.[9]

e) Unfortunately for Egypt and other Arab states, the autocrat's appetite for power was not confined to Egypt. Nasser gradually came to see himself as an emissary of divine providence to the entire region (the message delivered via inflammatory media campaigns and his intelligence services' orchestration of conspiracies against regimes in Arab countries) and the liberator of Palestine from the river to the sea, though he possessed not even the most basic vision or the economic resources to support his country's regional expansionist ambitions. He further lacked a well-thought-out military plan for liberation, a qualified and trained army, and international allies to strengthen his hand.

It is instructive to consider the political approach adopted by Simon Bolivar during his struggle to liberate Latin America from Spanish colonialism in the nineteenth century. Bolivar carefully cultivated the support of major international players while simultaneously refusing to merge the continent's countries into a single regional state under his leadership after liberation.[10] It is worth noting that Bolivar was born in Venezuela but became president of Colombia, while a third country, Bolivia, was named after him. Recall, too, that Jawaharlal Nehru, the historic leader of post-independence India and a leading figure in the Non-Aligned Movement, advised Nasser during a visit to Egypt to adopt the democratic path. According to Ismail Sabri Abdullah, a prominent leader of the Egyptian communist movement, Nehru told him: 'Mr. President, power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.'[11]

Us and Them

One would be hard pressed to find similarities between the powers of kings and princes in the Arab world and their counterparts in countries like Sweden, the Netherlands, and Britain. One reason is that in the West, the monarch reigns but does not rule; elected, non-royal institutions and politicians effectively monopolise the powers of government. It is even harder to compare the powers of presidents in elected systems of government in the West and those in the Arab world, whether these systems are presidential republics or parliamentary systems. A Syrian leftist writer observed more than two years ago[12] that the frameworks governing the relationship between rulers and their people. and rulers' relationship with their counterparts in other countries, are completely different in Europe and the Arab world—the exact inverse in fact. European rulers use the instruments of politics to engage with their peoples (transparent electoral competition, parliamentary deliberations that culminate in resolutions and legislation bearing the imprint of the

elected majority, a free and competitive media, an independent judiciary, and freedom to organise political and civic initiatives), while in their relationships with other states, European and non-European, they act with the logic of a sovereign, seeking to achieve the political and economic interests of the electorate as a whole. In the eastern and southern Mediterranean, the reverse holds. The ruler engages with the populace like a sovereign, dictating plans, policies, and orders. Though institutions exist that bear the same names as their Western counterparts, their sole function is to serve as a theatre for the enactment of pre-determined policies and decisions and to justify the low-level or outright brutal repression of critics. This same ruler, however, is careful to manage his relationship with other states with the logic of diplomacy and accommodation, unless he is under intense external pressure or needs to extort his people by claiming that the state is facing an external threat, real or fabricated.

Israel, of course, belongs to the first group of states. The Jewish citizen is the sovereign there, and the current bloody ruler, who has waged wars on seven fronts over the past two years, is subjected to a daily trial by public opinion in the media, on the streets, and before a judiciary that is trying him for crimes of corruption. This might seem amusing to the Arab reader familiar with the corruption that runs rampant throughout the ruling circles of the Arab world, but a Palestinian analyst observes that Israel in recent years has been sliding towards authoritarian autocracy due to 'a new form of militarisation of Israeli politics and society.'[13]

Again, look for the role of political elites in driving this transformation.

Two Worlds, Two Social Contracts

A crucial reason for this inverted logic in the Arab world – as opposed to Europe – is the persistence of power relations that entrench a social contract of subservience inherited nearly seventy years ago: bread for freedom and dignity. In Arab countries where rulers over the last decade have proven incapable of providing bread at an affordable price and guaranteeing the minimum necessities of life, 'security' has been offered as an alternative. The tragedies of other nations—Libya, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen—are held up as a frightening warning of what could be.

But Arab rulers, whether civilian, military, or Salafis like Ahmed al-Sharaa in Syria, continue to rely on the relative devaluation of freedom by the elites who have dominated the political and cultural spheres in the region since the mid-twentieth century, in favour of other issues and causes (secularism, religious doctrine, social justice, or Palestine), which ultimately undermines the worth of those very same causes. Even those who believe the Palestinian cause is the central issue for all Arab peoples have been unable to demonstrate their solidarity with the Palestinians, and precisely because they are denied freedom. The true central cause in the Arab world is freedom, a fact that the majority of the region's political and cultural elites still fail to grasp.

Despite the vast disparity between the situation of Palestinians under occupation and that of other peoples in Arab countries, the status of citizens in the latter is similar to that of refugees, who by definition lack citizenship rights even though they do hold citizenship by birth, possess state-issued national identity cards and passports, and may have even served in their country's military.

Though the situations are not identical, it is an edifying exercise to consider the many similarities between Palestinians' unarmed, civil resistance to displacement by the Israeli settlement enterprise in the West Bank and Egyptian citizens' resistance, using the limited civil means available to them over eight years, to the military regime's plan to displace them from the Nile River island of Warraq in Cairo.

In fact, if we look at the genocidal crimes committed by Iraqi president Saddam Hussein against Iraqi Shia and Kurdish citizens, Syrian presidents Hafez and Bashar al-Assad against Syrian Sunni citizens, and Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir against Sudanese citizens in Darfur and the South—crimes continued by al-Bashir's allies in the army and the Rapid Support Forces—we can find little fundamental distinction between the cruelty and brutality of the crimes of the 'national' ruler (or more accurately, the national coloniser)[14] and that of a foreign occupying army (Israeli) against another people (the Palestinians). Here, the Palestinian and Arab realities are near identical, and their congruence reveals the momentous task facing human rights defenders in the Arab world: we are dealing with a *political* particularity that some wrongly take for a cultural particularity with ethnic and/or religious roots to explain the stance of societies in the Arab world on the universality of human rights.

Which Political Particularity Are We Referring to?

There are two dimensions to this unconventional particularity. One is the extent of the ruthlessness of the national ruler, freed from all political, legal, or humanitarian constraints, and the predatory psychology that defines his view of his country's citizens. The second, more serious aspect, which defies logic and presents a challenge to the mission of human rights advocates in the Arab world, concerns political and cultural elites. Some of these rulers, who prey on their citizens psychologically and physically—who see their people as nothing more than necessary props in their coronation as sovereigns—still enjoy overwhelming popularity among the children and grandchildren of their victims.

There is a story that Gamal Abdel Nasser, plotting against a prominent Egyptian national leader before the 23 July 1952 coup, said of the man, 'He taught me politics, but I will make him give up politics.'[15]

This was not an idle, individual threat, but the rallying call of an entire era, which echoed throughout Egypt and the indeed the entire region for more than half a century. With this threat, Nasser promised to exclude millions of Egyptians from politics, by all means of coercion, except when it came time to pledge allegiance to the sole leader. Later they would take to the streets in their millions, weeping and begging him to remain on the throne,[16] so that he could continue to subjugate them even after inflicting upon their army the most devastating, humiliating defeat in their country's modern history. In this sense, Nasser's most significant victory in the nearly two decades he ruled Egypt was his moral victory over his own people, which stripped them of any means to resist a foreign or domestic occupier. And he left his despotic successors a crucial tool

for consolidating their rule: Egyptians' indifference to politics and their abdication of any shared public responsibility for the present and future of their nation.

A Rights Movement for a Different World

The moral value of universal human rights principles undoubtedly constitutes a key pillar of the struggle for rights and democracy in the Arab world, but principles alone cannot tell us what strategy is effective and appropriate for any specific sociopolitical and cultural reality. This is truer today given the erosion of the international human rights system and the many blows dealt to it by the new American administration. The human rights movement, today more than ever, must prioritise repairing the longstanding ruin in the region's political culture and must not tolerate the political discourse that trades subjugation for a morsel of bread, even under the guise of economic and social 'rights.' Politics, including economic and social policies—that is, the management of public affairs—determines, for better or worse, the extent to which citizens in any country enjoy the right to bread and a decent, dignified standard of living. Nevertheless, bread has never determined the present and future of public affairs. Look at the former communist states: although they claimed to provide the optimal conditions for the enjoyment of economic and social rights, the cost was denying their peoples the most basic political rights. Ultimately, these regimes collapsed, not only because they denied peoples their political freedoms, but also because of the low standards of living in most of these countries (compare East and West Germany, for example). Various studies argue that despite the enormous wealth disparities in Western societies, they are still more egalitarian than other countries.[17]

It is only logical, of course, for bread be approached as a vital public concern—though not the only concern. This means that public affairs in general must be a primary item on the citizenry's agenda, which in turn requires a return to politics and a renewed emphasis on the centrality of freedom and equal citizenship rights. In this context, the human rights movement should re-examine a maxim long established in its literature and advocacy: the idea of a normative equivalence between the status of civil and political rights on one hand and economic, social, and cultural rights on the other. The leftist thinker Hannah Arendt may have been right to criticise some Marxists for prioritising bread over freedom or placing them on equal footing: 'If Marx helped in liberating the poor, then it was not by telling them that they were the living embodiment of some historical or other necessity, but by persuading them that poverty itself is a political, not a natural, phenomenon, the result of violence and violation rather than scarcity.'[18]

From this perspective, it is clear how much is lost in the struggle for democracy and human rights when some—rights defenders and others—reduce it to a technical task or a legalistic, procedural demand in Arab countries that have been straining for more than half a century under a form of political subjugation they could not tolerate under foreign occupation. As one scholar observes, 'The persuasive character of legal judgements resembles what [German philosopher Jürgen] Habermas calls the peculiarly "forceless force'' of the better argument.'[19] In contrast, the core of the human rights cause is freedom, the development of people's political and social reality,

and the development of relations of political power to enable people to enjoy the right to citizenship, monitor its exercise, and hold accountable anyone who impedes it. It urges people to cling to their rights and resist any attempt to infringe or deny them, using all peaceful means. This framing for defending human rights follows the French Revolution's *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*—a pivotal source of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—which provides for the right to resist injustice and tyranny.

This recognition also requires revisiting the concept of civil society, which in the Arab world is often reduced from a laboratory for societal transformations to a handful of groups functioning like robots in a virtual reality.[20]

It is this issue in particular that I hope actors in the Levant will ponder, especially in Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon, where the recent collapse of the Persian Shia imperial project has opened up possibilities unseen in decades to liberate ourselves from Iranian and local fascist hegemony, build independent states, and establish social contracts that enshrine citizenship rights, whether in centralised or decentralised states. This transformation—if realised—could usher in a political dawn for human rights in this region, with positive implications for other Arab states. Worryingly, minimising the importance of creative engagement with the political nature of this shift, and reducing this historic task to traditional, technical, and legal approaches and activities, could tip the scales in favour of parties in and out of ruling circles who seek to turn back the clock.

It is difficult to envision a promising future for the defence of human rights in the Arab world as a whole without siding with the people in the liberation movement contesting the eradication of politics from societies. This is the central task of human rights defenders and others striving to establish a democratic system. Exceptional attention must therefore be paid to the problems of the prevailing political culture in the Arab world and the morbid narratives with currency among political elites, some of them addressed in this essay, as well as their participation in devaluing freedom in the post-independence era.[21] Human rights defenders must dedicate themselves to the development of an alternative philosophy, framework, and language for human rights discourse. This task will likely also require articulating new visions and designing effective strategies for a situation that is radically different from the political and cultural environment of free societies in Europe, Latin America, and Asia. In those states, where the value of freedom is deeply rooted in the political culture of elites and society, power relations, actors, institutions, and effective mechanisms have evolved over time, which has enabled remedies, corrections, and development.

Human rights defenders in the Arab world need not adopt suicidal policies and stances. Rather, they should develop strategies and policies that allow them to avoid the self-destructive path they may be blindly headed down. Five decades since the inception of human rights, organisations in the Arab world have demonstrated that this is a dead end. The methods pursued by human rights organisations in other regions of the world are not fit for their purpose, given the profound differences between the historical, political, and cultural contexts of those regions and the Arab world. These differences include the particularity of the chronic political crisis gripping Arab societies, which stems from the resistance of post-independence national regimes to embracing modernisation and industrialisation like other developing states.

Accordingly, human rights organisations in the region may need to undertake a creative reappraisal of their historical mission and consider repositioning themselves at the national, regional, and international levels. This may require them to restructure their role and develop new, more appropriate strategies. It does not mean abandoning advocacy, but it may entail scaling down the legal aspect of their work at the national and international levels and innovating a human rights discourse at the national level that accounts for the ills of mainstream political culture and dominant narratives. They may also need to articulate a non-legalistic human rights discourse that speaks to the world with an awareness of the ongoing setbacks in the international system, while remaining committed to human rights values

AI Assistance Statement

The author did not use any AI tools or programmes.

About the Author

Bahey eldin Hassan is a writer and founding member of the human rights movement in Egypt since 1985. He co-founded the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies in 1994 and served as its director until 2025.

This article is originally written in Arabic for Rowaq Arabi.

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[20] Bahey eldin Hassan, 'The Chemical Autumn of the Arab Region and the Political Responsibility of Civil Society,' in *Annual Report on Human Rights in the Arab Region 2017–2018* (Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, 2018), accessed 1 March 2026, https://cihrs.org/arab-region-annual-report-2017-2018/?lang=en.
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