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Spotlight Report

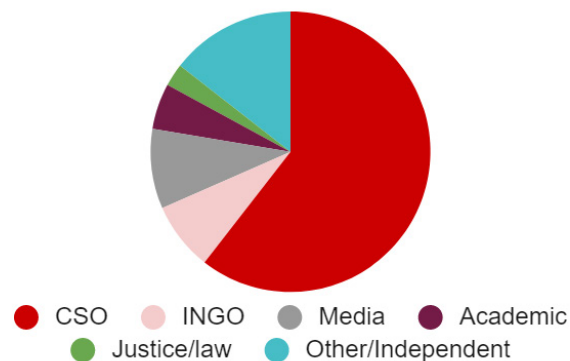
Tunisia

Spotlight Report Tunisia

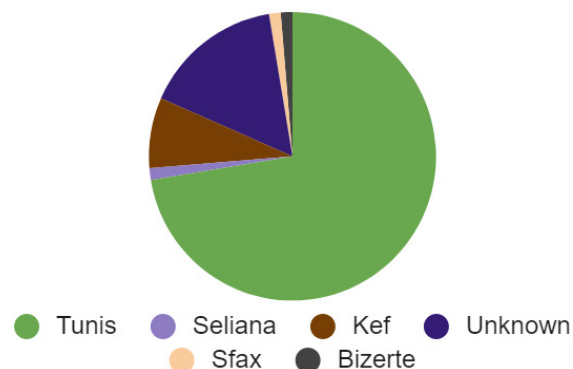
■ Background

In response to the political developments of July 2021 in Tunisia, and the step taken by the President on 25th July, 2021 the Tunisian Association for Democratic Women (ATFD) co-founded a dynamic working group, called Dynamique Feministe (DF). This collective consists of a wide range of associations¹ from around the country concerned with the rights of women, equality and social justice, who came together to work on a common message/response to the social, political and economic reality of Tunisia. After a number of meetings and workshops, the Memorandum was finalised and presented in a press conference on 30 August. This document contains a response to a range of important political, economic and social issues that require addressing in the upcoming political developments in Tunisia, following the “state of exception” imposed by the president. Following the presentation of the Memorandum, ATFD began co-organising a group of meetings amongst the newly formed coalition with the aim of building on the newly achieved momentum a national dialogue surrounding the key concerns of DF.

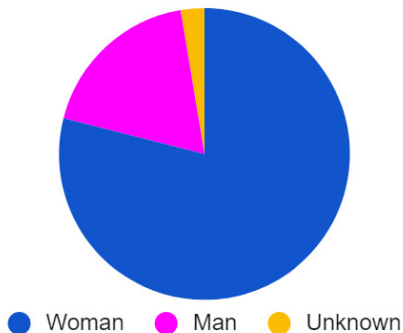
In this regard, on November 2021 ,4, Dynamique Feministe hosted a “thinking workshop” (the National Dialogue) in Tunis Mechtel Hotel, which more than 70 people from a wide range of backgrounds attended. These included national and international NGOs, students and academics, media, judges and independent activists.



As a “thinking workshop on the current political and economic situation of Tunisia,” the event provided a unique intersectional and multidisciplinary space of discussion between civil society actors.



This event managed to bring together people and viewpoints from different regions of the country. And while around %72 of the attendees were from Tunis, they contributed to the national character of the conversation due to the wide reach/agenda of the organisations they were affiliated with.



Also, the speakers of the event assessed the topic of the discussion from 4 different perspectives and fields of expertise.² Moreover, as seen in the following chart, with more than %78 of the attendees being women, in addition to a national representation, DF managed to create a space where the voices of women were heard, so that their views could be incorporated in future actions and policies. Amongst these women were seven members of La terre pour tous, an association of women around the country whose children have gone missing due to irregular migration. They voiced concerns that touched upon important and widespread economic, social and political difficulties. For instance, they pointed to the failure of public policies and institutions in dealing with the pursuit of their loved ones. Other key points raised in the discussion were as follows:

- The need for the feminist coalition in Tunisia to assess the situation and to offer alternatives independently from those who are against their shared principles;
- Need for clarity on our understanding of the current situation and for the creation of common visions in facing the rising populism that seeks to divide society and create a rupture between people as a civil body organized in associations, unions, and parties;
- Emphasis on the need for widespread

participation, particularly of women, minorities and the marginalized communities in forming a social and political vision towards true democracy;

- Need for clarity and unity on the aspects of the constitution that the feminist coalition seeks to adhere to and fight for in the upcoming political developments in Tunisia, especially the upcoming national debate on reforming/replacing the 2014 constitution;
- The necessity of preparing advocacy tools for defending women's rights (policy paper) and submitting them to the Presidency of the Republic;
- Call for vigilance and readiness to mobilise in order to confront deviations of political power and to defend the gains made for women in Tunisia.

■ Overview of national context in Tunisia

ATFD and all other members of the DF operate in a highly politicized and at times divided environment. Moreover, the lack of progressive leadership capable of carrying out the Human Rights and Women's Rights agenda inside the parliament (before being frozen by the President in July 2021) meant that the associations and activists were under increasing pressure. Making matters worse, a wave of regression amongst MPs, political actors and journalists, combined with continued assaults and aggressions perpetrated against women activists, feminist associations and women politicians, meant that activists and associations have to be extremely vigilant and careful in their message, political position and coalitions. Furthermore, civil society operates in a highly

politicized and volatile environment. The days following Qais Saïd's 'exceptional measures' were filled with uncertainty. In this environment, one of the key challenges facing DF was to gather a critical mass around a common cause and to create a common message that would be encompassing and inclusive of a wide range of concerns and issues. This would in turn allow the feminist movement to begin mobilizing with the aim of putting human rights and women rights at the top of the political agenda. The constant change in the circumstance, e.g. a new announcement/decreed by the President or regional developments (protests, arrests, etc.), continue to make planning and coordination difficult. The political uncertainty was coupled with the uncertainty caused by the Covid19-pandemic, which made organization and planning of meetings and events in the future even more difficult.

■ Key calls and challenges identified³

Assessing the historic turning point that Tunisia is in from a women's rights perspective, the members of DF formulated their demands in order to guarantee real dignity, effective citizenship and full equality for all women and citizens. The calls echoed in the Memorandum and the discussions during the National Dialogue are based on the recognition, respect, protection and enjoyment of rights and freedoms of all citizens. This recognition must further be without distinction or discrimination, without any exclusion based on sex, race, nationality, color, opinions, belief, culture, language, origin, social class, disability, individual choices, sexual orientation, state of health or state of poverty, and economic vulnerability.

The following is a selection of recommendations of DF in the Memorandum, with a particular emphasis on the ones focusing on the socio-economic level:

■ At the political level

- The preservation of the civil state, the rule of law and institutions as founded on the will of the people, pluralism, the supremacy of the Law, the separation of religion and politics, the peaceful transfer of power, and the implementation of international conventions ratified by the Tunisian Republic.
- The respect for human rights in their universality and indivisibility, the guarantee of individual and public freedoms, the consolidation of the achievements of the Constitution of 2014, specifically regarding equality between citizens and the freedoms of thought, expression, conscience, association and press.
- The adoption of the necessary measures to guarantee the independence of the judiciary, to fight against corruption within the judicial system as well as to prohibit any trial of civilians before military courts.
- The adoption of parity between women and men in the composition of the government, which is responsible for responding to the people's demands for their right to a decent life as well as to deal with the health crisis linked to the COVID19- pandemic by offering quality health and social services. Members of the new government must take all necessary measures to overcome the economic crisis, limit debt and save the country from bankruptcy.
- The implementation of the report of the Court of Auditors and the application of Article 163 of the electoral law with a view to excluding from

the political sphere those who are corrupt and/or are indicted in cases of corruption or terrorism.

- The realization of fundamental rights and freedoms, particularly the right to associative action, and the preservation of the achievements of the Decree-Law n° 2011 - 88.
- The adoption of the necessary measures for women's access to decision-making positions in national, communal and international institutions in compliance with the provisions of Article 46 of the Constitution. To this end, it is important to revise the electoral law in order to guarantee vertical and horizontal parity in legislative, communal and regional elections.

■ At the socio-economic level

Regarding the fight against poverty and the unequal distribution of wealth

- The revision of the state budget and the finance law, especially in education and health, in order to ensure the quality of services within the framework of an overall development approach aimed at promoting equality, social justice, equal opportunities for women and regions, respect for national sovereignty and the guarantee of wealth and well-being for vulnerable groups. To this end, we call for the development of a strategy to combat the feminization of poverty.
- The adoption of the necessary measures for the right of women to work with dignity in decent and equal conditions as provided for in Article 40 of the Constitution. To this end, we call for the application of parity between men and women in recruitment processes in order to overcome discrimination in access to

employment, with the unemployment rate of women graduates being double that of men (%25 against %12).

- The adoption of additional provisions to the Labor Law, requiring the cancellation of any competition or job offer that does not respect equal opportunities for disabled people seeking employment. Legislative provisions require the allocation of %2 of recruitments to people with disabilities.
- The need to include, in ordinary and exceptional social assistance programs, single-parent families, specifically single mothers and women without family support.
- The revision of the databases of people receiving social assistance from a gender perspective to ensure that women have equal access to this assistance.
- The implementation of positive measures for the benefit of women and young people in impoverished and marginalized regions and the repeal of discriminatory inheritance laws that limit women's access to property and exclude them from wealth; equality in inheritance being inseparable from economic rights
- The implementation of Article 18 of the Organic Budget Law that guarantees the equal incorporation of men, women and all categories of society in the state budget.

Regarding the health sector

- Consider the health of Tunisian women and men as an absolute priority and begin the reform of the public health system by mobilizing the necessary human and material resources, guaranteeing and protecting women's access to the care system, assigning women individual (and not family) care cards to ensure their autonomous access to care, and by completing vaccination against Covid19- .
- Implementing the Tunisian government's commitments to care for women victims of violence according to the principles of priority and free care, and prioritizing sexual and reproductive health, especially in times of crisis when the mortality rate related to pregnancy and childbirth is on the rise.
- To establish a specialized health program for the care of women victims of violence in emergency services, for the benefit of all medical and paramedical staff and psychological specialists.
- Strengthen nursing homes by recruiting "specialized care providers", in order to promote women's employability and to reduce the strain on the paramedic workforce.

Regarding the fight against discrimination and violence against women

- The revision of all discriminatory provisions of the Personal Status Code, such as those relating to the institution of the head of the family, dowry, guardianship, inheritance, waiting periods, lineage, etc.
- Revising labor laws to ensure an equitable distribution of family responsibilities in the areas of education and childcare.
- The revision of discriminatory legislative texts that exclude women from wealth and decent jobs, thereby reducing their chances of access to investment and financing opportunities; e.g.

the finance law, the Personal Status Code, the inheritance law, small loans, the law of the social and solidarity economy, etc.

- The implementation of Law n° 2017-58 against violence against women by making its sanctions as well as its preventive measures effective, including the removal of the aggressor, the acceleration of the examination of cases pending before the courts, and the initiation of proceedings against MPs involved in cases of financial or moral corruption.
- The organization of trainings for the benefit of prosecutors and magistrates in charge of cases of violence against women, to prepare for the creation of specialized chambers dedicated to this matter. It is also important to ensure that women have access to the help of a lawyer approved by the National Bar Association.
- The promotion of a culture of equality by reforming discriminatory education programs and providing sexual and reproductive health education as stipulated by law, stripped of the shackles of taboos and focused on gender equality, and physical and psychological development. There is an urgent need to put an end to the abominable crimes committed against women and children, which are now on the rise due to the political crisis and the climate of impunity.
- The implementation of a policy of collaboration between municipal councils and civil society in the areas of care for women victims of violence, with a view to providing reception centers dedicated to these women and applying the principle of equal opportunities.
- The establishment of a compensation fund for the benefit of women victims of violence.

Regarding the care of vulnerable categories

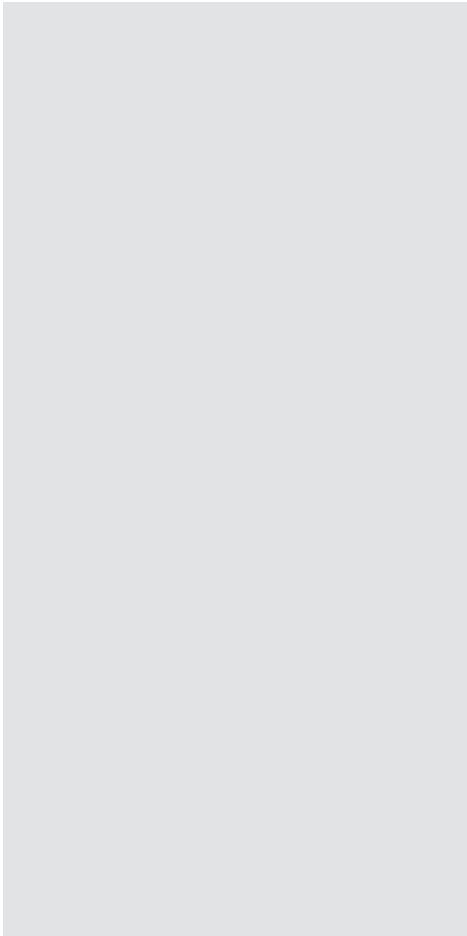
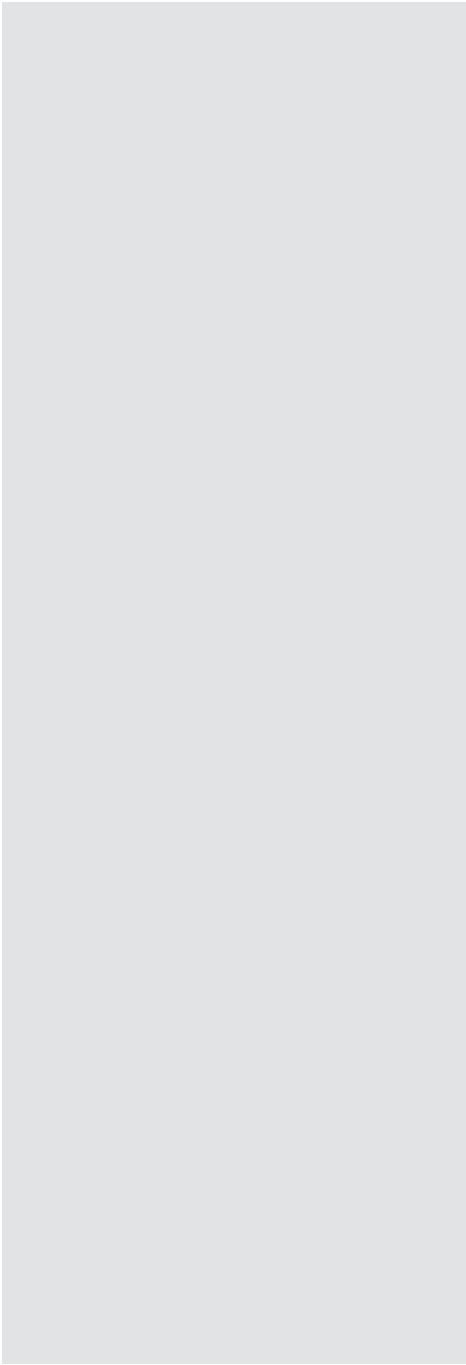
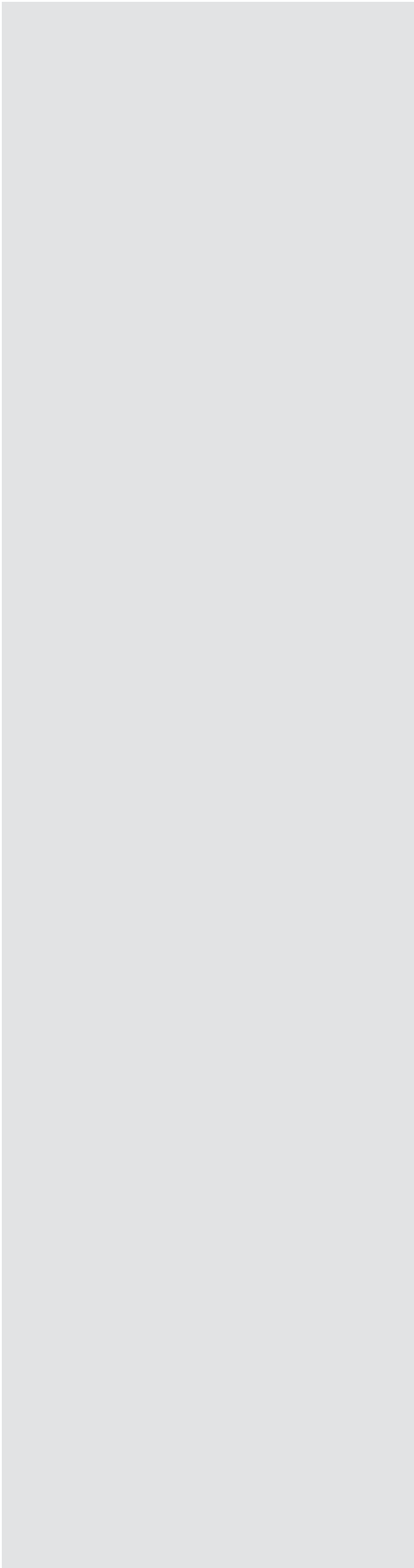
- Taking into account the special situation of single mothers, widowed or divorced women and single-parent families, and the implementation of the law on domestic employment.
- Providing social protection to women working in the agricultural sector, ensuring their access to safe transport, encouraging the use of state owned land through investment while respecting equal pay and the right to decent work.

Regarding the right to water and a healthy environment



- Guaranteeing access to water for all, in accordance with article 44 of the Constitution. It is essential to provide safe drinking water to all citizens, and to consider programs for the supply, control and rational use of water to end the burden on women in rural areas.
- To strengthen the efforts of occupational physicians in their quest to develop a strategy to combat diseases in highly polluted industrial areas.
- Repairing damage to people and property affected by environmental abuse and prosecuting those responsible for importing waste.
- Respect the right to a healthy and balanced environment and not transform development projects into environmental and health disasters, as has been done in several interior regions.



Endnotes

- 1 The steering committee of the Dynamique Feministe consists of the following associations: the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women (ATFD), the Association of Tunisian Women for Research on Development (AFTURD), Beiti, Aswat Nissa, Calam, Women and Citizenship Association (El Kef), Joussour Association of Citizenship (AJC - El Kef), the Tawhida Ben Cheikh Association, and Amal.
- 2 See Annex 7 for the profiles of the speakers.
- 3 The calls mentioned here are the ones echoed in DF's Memorandum.



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