

Blog by EL Hammoumi Naoufal. Youth worker/ambassador from Morocco.

My first trip to Tunisia was in 1999. I came back again in 2007, and then in 2012 – the year of Tunisia’s transformation. In 2012, I met with a wonderful group of youth from the Arab world, in a meeting organized by Cordaid, Human Security Collective and Search For Common Ground. In this meeting, young activists shared their vision on the Arab world after the Arab Spring. It was a wonderful meeting with a committed group of youth activists who collaborate on developing the concept of human security along with a culture of tolerance in their communities in Tunisia, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Yemen and Lebanon.

Tunisia has inspired us in the region as being a country of safety and peace, where there was meant to be no place for extremism after the Arab Spring. However, the weakening of state power has created a fertile environment for violent extremism. The ongoing socio-economic crisis, poverty and low GDP-per-capita rate adds further to the state being exploited. Tunisia is struggling and suffering from conflicting interests, not least from those who do not shy away from funding extremist groups in the country. This is not the only conflict that Tunisia is facing. Other, non-religious forms of extremism exist as well, for example on the far left. In many universities and communities, there is a major conflict between the left and the right, due to narrow political goals and ideologies. Everyone works to weaken the power of the central state, which makes this conflict an instigator of an environment that attracts extremist groups to the country from the mountains of Algeria and from Libya. This situation has also caused many Tunisian youth to become attracted to extremism despite the fact that youth here have generally been known for being secular, and distant from religious violent extremism. The recent numbers of young people from Tunisia that have left to join terrorist groups in Syria, Iraq and Libya are high. This is not a welcome prospect for North Africa and Southern Europe. The weakening of the central state for narrow political purposes simply kills the vigour of the state and weakens its capacity to coordinate in the region in order to stop violent extremism.

In this difficult context, local and international civil society organizations are developing initiatives that support youth leadership and help build resilience among young people and their communities. I was witness recently to one such important effort. In early 2016, a pilot project in Tunisia named ‘**Building Youth Resilience in Tunisia**’ was launched. It is supervised by a local association with the support of Human Security Collective (HSC). Human Security Collective is based in The Hague - consolidating the historical role of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in efforts aimed at peacebuilding, security and justice.

I had a great interaction with Human Security Collective staff members as I look forward to working with them to supporting this large network of young

peacebuilders. I hope this will be the start for developing a network of dedicated youth leaders who will work on several projects in the field of human security along with local communities in areas of conflict and those facing difficulties. The initiative is part of HSC's wider engagement with young leaders in Libya, Iraqi Kurdistan, Palestine, Tunisia and The Netherlands. Young leaders are supported to work on human security in their local community and to strengthen the role of local authorities, including institutions dedicated to youth. The programme helps youth find their voice and facilitates their engagement with policymakers at the local, national and international levels. The goal is to work with governments to bridge the gap to enable them to listen to the voice of civil society including young people when it comes to strategies aimed at preventing violent extremism at the local, regional, and international level.

HSC has an enthusiastic team with a young heart, persevering diligently and with the following underlying philosophy: humility, active listening to all viewpoints, and collaboration. In my 15 years of work with local and international civil society, I have been inspired by this vision and way of work that takes civil work from the mundane towards an added-value approach and contributes to the development of society through concepts of professional work coupled with an active vision.

In Palestine, HSC, in association with Cordaid, is working with a group of local associations in the West Bank and Gaza. This work is carried out with young Palestinian leaders and aims to build a generation of young people who believe in the importance of 'human security'; this same effort is also underway in Libya, and has recently kicked-off in Tunisia.

Great efforts carried out with simple means, but it certainly brings a smile to many young people. HSC has inspired hundreds of young people, to the extent that some of them are implementing similar initiatives in their countries and others, regardless of limited means. These young people believe that the Collective is not just an institution but a way of life, capacitating them to build safe communities and spreading that via positive action and simple communication. This is so important to build humanity, and to destroy prejudice.