

## **The West must come to the aid of the Arab World now, says leading international legal expert**

Professor Cherif Bassiouni, who has been closely involved in legal issues arising from the so-called "Arab Spring", including chairing the report on the situation in Bahrain, urged Western powers to come to the aid of the Arab World now. He said that "the major Western powers who are in a position to do something, should do it. This is the first time that there will be an opportunity without the possibility of gain, benefit or dominance". Notwithstanding the anti-Western sentiment, which is directed at governments rather than individuals, he called on the Western powers with the ability to help, to take the chance to do so now, before "we see a continuation of the present situation and its exacerbation in the future".

Delivering the annual Grotius Lecture of the British Institute of International and Comparative Law, an independent legal research institute based in London, Professor Bassiouni spoke on the topic of 'The Arab Spring, the Arab Awakening or the Ongoing Arab Revolution?'. He focused on the dramatic events of the last eighteen months in the Arab world.

He said that "what you are seeing in the Arab World is, for multiple reasons, a continued set of individual conflagrations, which will take their own individual course, which will develop based on their own internal dynamics but they will feed on the dynamics of their neighbours, they will also be largely dependent on external geopolitical concerns, they will also be subject to the transformation of that original internal revolution which is likely to take it in some cases to a sectarian conflict, as in the case of Syria, as we have seen in Iraq, as we could see in Bahrain and Lebanon".

Professor Bassiouni said that: "I think the time has not come for Iran to use Bahrain or the Eastern part of Saudi Arabia, or Kuwait, as a new front in its sectarian geopolitical conflict. It is now heavily involved in Syria and I do not think it is ready to open up another front along those lines, but you can be sure that the time will come when this will develop".

He observed the lack of understanding of many people as to how the past plays a role in the present in every Arab country. In his view those countries are walking towards the future with their backs to it, so focused are they on the past. In a brief history of the Arab people, he noted the rapid spread of Islam across the world, which was at that time open to its "conquered populations" and where they became Muslim they were welcomed with open arms. He likened this period to a sort of European Union: "there was a free flow of goods and traffic and of people, and indigenous people were entrusted with the local administration and government, and people from other religions were invited in on the basis of their skills – a very enlightened 200 years develops". Then however ideas of nationalism and independence were embraced by the intelligentsia, resulting in a situation where their 'own people' became the oppressors, citing the Mubarak regime as an example. He said in the ensuing search for identity, economic and social justice, escape from political marginalization and sectarian dimensions, two things remained in the minds of the downtrodden masses: "rage and revolution" on the one hand that their situation has been created by their own people, and "the other sentiment is that all other ideologies have failed, and there is only one thing left, and that is Islam: the belief in God, because that is the last vanguard, the last way of saying that there has to be justice, from which springs the sense of hope".

Bassiouni stressed that although Islamic religious texts do not often touch upon legal issues, the respect of international law and the principle of the rule of law are inherent in them. One of the main postulates observed by the Prophet and other Islamic dignitaries was to respect international agreements concluded between various countries in that era in order to live in a peaceful and prosperous world.

Of the future he said: "That which we don't see is almost as troubling as that which we do. Nobody is paying much attention to what is happening in Jordan, and you have to look at the potential explosion there", as well as in Morocco, Algeria, which "is going to happen, a little later rather than sooner", and Lebanon, which will largely be a consequence of what happens in Syria, but he says that "Islamicist doctrine is going to prevail –that is the only ideology that exists. Do not think Saudia Arabia is immune from any cataclysmic events".

Professor Bassiouni's Lecture concluded the Annual Conference of the British Institute of International and Comparative Law, entitled "International Law, the Rule of Law and Constitutional Change". The conference considered the impact of 'Arab Spring' through panels of expert speakers, on questions related to the rule of law, public international law and international investment law ensuing from these events. Further information on the Conference and Lecture can be found at [www.biiicl.org/events](http://www.biiicl.org/events).

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