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## [Consultative Meeting on Civil Society Engagement with the League of Arab States](#)

The Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD) (Canada), Transparency Maroc (TM), Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA), Maharat Foundation (Lebanon) and Social Economic Forum for Women Organization (Jordan) jointly hosted a consultative meeting in Amman from 25-26 October 2018. The focus of the meeting, which is a continuation of the organisations' earlier work in this area, was on how to improve the opportunities for civil society organisations to engage with the League of Arab States (LAS).

A report on [Improving Civil Society Engagement at the League of Arab States](#), launched in September, found that the LAS lagged significantly behind other comparable inter-governmental organisations (IGOs) when it came to the issue of engagement.

The consultative meeting reviewed engagement rules and systems at other IGOs and compared them to the policy and practice at the LAS to identify specific gaps and areas for improvement. An important focus of the meeting was on how to advocate to enhance the performance of the LAS in this area.

A key outcome of the meeting was agreement on a Charter for Improving Civil Society Engagement with the League of Arab States, attached as an annex to this press release. The Charter sets out a civil society vision for the steps needed to improve the system of engagement with the LAS. The first set of recommendations calls on the LAS to conduct an open and inclusive process of consultation with civil society with a view to putting in place a new framework for engagement. The Charter also calls for a number of short-term measures, including in relation to access to information and opportunities for consultation.

A number of organisations have already endorsed the Charter and we are seeking further endorsements from civil society groups based in the Arab World.

The Charter can be accessed in English and Arabic at: [\[in English here\]](#) and [\[in Arabic here\]](#). For an Arabic version of this press release, [click here](#).

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# Charter for Improving Civil Society Engagement with the League of Arab States

**We, the undersigned civil society organisations, based in different Arab countries,**

*Recognising* the foundational importance for inter-governmental organisations, including the League of Arab States, of engaging in genuine consultations with civil society so as to improve their policy and decision-making processes, to build better relations with their constituents, who are ultimately the people living in Arab States, and to promote greater democracy in and accountability for their work;

*Noting* that the League of Arab States falls far short of better international practice, including the practice of similar inter-governmental organisations in other regions of the world, when it comes to engaging with civil society;

*Stressing* that the current civil society engagement arrangements and practices at the League of Arab States not only fail to respect basic human rights and democratic norms but also undermine the effectiveness, influence and legitimacy of the League of Arab States;

*Emphasising* that the trend, at both the national government and the inter-governmental levels, is strongly towards increasing engagement opportunities for civil society;

*Recalling* that effective engagement involves transparency, particularly around the subjects of engagement, and concrete and effective consultation opportunities;

*Highlighting* the fact that many civil society organisations based in Arab countries are both interested in and fully able to participate effectively in more genuine engagement opportunities at the League of Arab States, should such opportunities become available;

Call on the League of Arab States to undertake the following actions to improve its engagement with civil society:

## 1. Consultations about Engagement

The League of Arab States should conduct an open and inclusive process of consultation with civil society with a view to putting in place a new framework for engagement. This should respect the following:

- The process should be collaborative in nature, along the lines of a partnership or joint effort between the parties,<sup>1</sup> with the League of Arab States working closely with civil society to explore options for a strong engagement framework.
- The process should be transparent, with the League of Arab States providing civil society with access to all of the documents it needs to participate fully in the consultation process

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<sup>1</sup> As an example, Open Government Partnership (OGP) guidance on consultation is available at: [http://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/attachments/OGP\\_consultation%20FINAL.pdf](http://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/attachments/OGP_consultation%20FINAL.pdf).

and with information about the positions of different stakeholders and how it was used being provided.

- The League of Arab States should make a commitment at the beginning of the process to revise substantially its current approach to civil society engagement, including by adopting a new policy framework for this.
- Consideration should be given to creating a new, dedicated structure within the League of Arab States to lead on this process, in an attempt to address current relationship shortcomings and to build trust with civil society.

## 2. Access to Information

Ensuring access to information is key to building trust and to facilitating real engagement. The League of Arab States should practise far greater levels of openness than in the past. Following consultations, it should adopt a dedicated information disclosure policy in line with better international practice among inter-governmental organisations. In the meantime, it should do the following:

- Publish, sufficiently in advance, information, including the agendas, of key meetings and other engagement opportunities, along with key relevant background documents, subject only to legitimate grounds for secrecy.
- Respond promptly and fulsomely to requests for information, including by appointing staff with dedicated responsibilities for doing this.
- Take full advantage, in doing the above, of digital technologies, including by providing information for free and in open digital formats.

## 3. Short-term Engagement Measures

The League of Arab States should undertake the following measures to improve engagement over the short term, pending the outcome of the consultation process noted above:

- The current observer status system should be transformed into a consultative status approach, so that individuals and organisations with status benefit from a range of engagement rights and opportunities. This should include the rights to make submissions and interventions, and not merely the right to attend meetings and listen to official actors.
- The process of obtaining status should be open, streamlined and insulated from political or other irrelevant considerations, so that status is given to any organisation which meets pre-defined conditions for obtaining consultative status.
- To the extent possible, the grant of status should directly enable the holder to engage with a range of League of Arab States bodies, including, in particular, those dealing with human rights and economic and social development.
- A number of engagement options beyond the status system should be put in place, such as the ability to apply on an *ad hoc* basis to attend a particular meeting or to work with the League of Arab States to implement projects or policies.

## Endorsements

1. ADALA, Morocco
2. Maharat Foundation, Lebanon
3. Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA)
4. Social Economic Forum for Women Organization, Jordan
5. TAFRA, Morocco
6. Transparency Maroc