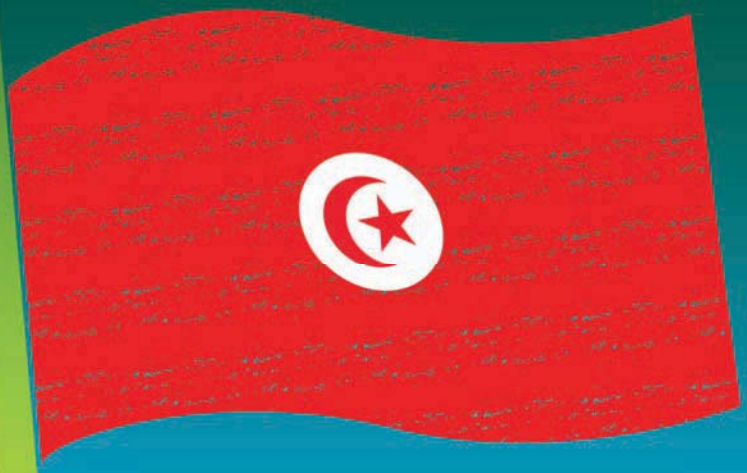
AN INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE ON
SAFEGUARDING HIGHER EDUCATION
IN TUNISIA AND BEYOND



# THE UNIVERSITY AND THE NATION

FEBRUARY 21-22, 2013
UNIVERSITY OF MANOUBA
FACULTY OF LETTERS, ARTS, AND HUMANITIES
TUNIS, TUNISIA

THE UNIVERSITY AND THE NATION:
SAFEGUARDING HIGHER EDUCATION
IN TUNISIA & BEYOND

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## The NYU Center for Dialogues: Islamic World — U.S. — The West

For the past decade, when anger, extremism and misunderstanding strained the relationship between the Muslim world and the West, the NYU Center for Dialogues sought to bridge the divide through dialogue based on mutual respect.

Today, the Center's mission has shifted in response to the "Arab Spring" and the Islamist movements taking part in the political life of various countries of the Middle East and North Africa. The NYU Center for Dialogues is working to ensure that the values embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are upheld by these new democracies and lay the foundation for a more comprehensive and lasting peace both domestically and with the West.

After more than ten years of activities around the world, the Center for Dialogues has established a reputation as a serious and important institution, grounded in solid scholarship and objective analysis. The Center's programs are making a tangible impact: its conferences are widely discussed in international policy circles, its publications are used as educational material in university classrooms, its network of peacemakers is expanding, and its staff is sought after to contribute the institution's perspective at conferences, on advisory panels, and in the media.

The Center is unique among similar institutions at American universities for combining public outreach, international conferences, academic study, and policy review and recommendations. Government leaders and other civil authorities and organizations, including media decision–makers, attend the Center's meetings in order to help effect policy change and alter public perceptions. The Center's findings are published as policy papers, as well as in book form, and are disseminated to educational institutions worldwide for use by students, faculty, and researchers. Moreover, the Center for Dialogues is creating a network of leaders who will continue to communicate with and consult one another for years to come —a valuable network for negotiating peace in times of crisis, and for encouraging new Islamist regimes to uphold universal human values.

## Scholars At Risk

Scholars at Risk is an international network of higher education institutions and individuals acting to protect threatened colleagues, promote academic freedom and defend everyone's right to think, question and share ideas freely and safely.

Scholars at Risk protects scholars suffering grave threats to their lives, liberty and well-being, primarily by arranging positions of sanctuary at institutions in the network for those forced to flee. Scholars at Risk also provides advisory services for host institutions and scholars, including those still under threat as well as those forced into exile who are struggling to restart their lives and their careers. In the decade since its launch hundreds of higher education institutions and thousands of individuals in more than 35 countries have opened their hearts and homes. With their help, over 70 scholars each year are helped to find safety and renewal at participating campuses. Over 250 more are helped through advising, referrals and advocacy campaigns.

Building on this work protecting individuals, Scholars at Risk conducts research, monitoring and education aimed at raising awareness, preventing attacks and strengthening protections for academic freedom and university values worldwide. Through the SAR Speaker Series, the SAR University Values Bulletin, and SAR Scholars-in-Prison Project institutions, academic staff and students everywhere can take part in a growing international movement to share powerful stories and to inspire others to take action. Scholars at Risk's new Academic Freedom MONITOR especially provides researchers an opportunity to contribute directly to improving conditions; by reporting on attacks on higher education communities, researchers help Scholars at Risk press for investigations of abuses and accountability for perpetrators.

Scholars at Risk has always worked with partners in the Middle East and North Africa, protecting individuals and sponsoring workshops to build understanding. In response to the "Arab Spring" Scholars at Risk has redoubled these efforts, sharing the experience of the international higher education community with colleagues in the region who are instrumental to the renewal of their campuses and societies. We invite institutions, leaders and individuals throughout the region and beyond to join us in this important mission.

## Acknowledgements

Both the conference, *The University and the Nation,* and this report, required the effort and talent of an extraordinary group of people. From its inception in the fall of 2011, the conference overcame more than its fair share of obstacles, including a frustrating postponement following riots at the U.S. Embassy in Tunis and the burning of the American Cooperative School in Tunis. Despite many challenges, dedication from our colleagues ensured that the conference was a success. We would like to take this opportunity to show our appreciation for those that made the conference possible.

First, we would like to thank the French Government's Interministerial Mission of the Union for the Mediterranean, the U.S. Department of State, and the Fondation Hanns Seidel for providing the funding for the conference. Each has demonstrated a commitment to a continued dialogue about political freedoms, and to the particular case for academic freedom in Tunisia and in the region.

We would like to thank the University of Manouba, especially Dean Habib Kazdaghli and the Faculty of Letters, Arts, and Humanities, for hosting the conference. We were delighted to learn, as we finalized this report, of the vindication of the Dean by a Tunisian court, dismissing all charges against him[1]. We commend the Tunisian judicial system for upholding its commitment to a fair legal process and hope that in the future the judicial system will only increase its commitments to academic freedom and human rights.

The conference would not have been possible without the efforts of the Tunisian Observatory of Democratic Transition and its former president, Hamadi Redissi. Professor Redissi's insights were key to the intellectual reasoning of the conference and the Observatory proved to be an important sponsor in the planning of the conference.

Our gratitude goes out as well to our co-sponsors, the Tunisian Association for the Defense of Academic Values, the Forum Universitaire Tunisien, and the Observatory of Academic Liberties, for providing their expertise.

The coordination of the conference relied on the flexibility and organizational skills of Sana Houimli and Meyssa Ben Nahila, who ensured that every need was met.

We would also like to thank the outstanding panelists who came from Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Turkey, Egypt, the United States, and Tunisia to share their thoughtful insights. Each made a unique contribution to the continuing dialogue on academic values and the relationship of the university and the nation. We hope that as the conversation moves forward, each will work to continue the discussion.

The conference would not have been possible without the skillful simultaneous interpretation provided by Sonovision, or the beautiful photography from Photo Chahir. Christa Bianchi Graphic Design designed an excellent poster that managed to capture the spirit of the conference.

This report relied on the valuable contributions of Joel Rozen, Hend Hassassi, and Oumayma Ben Abdallah and also benefited from the brilliant editing of Shara Kay, on whom the Center for Dialogues has relied since its inception in 2001. We thank all for their hard work in producing this report.

Finally, none of this would have been possible without the steadfast support of the staff of the Center for Dialogues and Scholars at Risk. In particular, we would like to thank Abigail Fradkin, Lauren Crain, Saumya Kurup, Aubrey Clark-Brown, and the *Dialogues* intern, Samea Shanori. This fantastic team coordinated with our international partners, booked flights, planned receptions, managed participants and guests, stuffed folders, processed payments, and wrote the majority of this report. We would like to thank them for forever having our backs.

1 Despite the initial ruling of the case in May 2013, which dismissed the charges and raised suspended sentences against the accusers, the prosecutor has indicated that he is appealing the court's decision.

## Preface

In late 2010, Tunisia sparked a political and social transformation that swept through the Middle East and North Africa. Authoritarian regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya collapsed while other regimes confronted demands for change with responses that ranged from reform to repression. New leaders, representing previously suppressed ideals and expressing previously stifled demands, were given the opportunity to guide their nations into a new era in the midst of growing uncertainty about economic stability, security, and human rights. Today, these transformations are ongoing. Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya are at various stages in the process of drafting constitutions and determining the nature of their governments. These three countries and others in the region have demonstrated that democratization is a complex and often frustrating process that requires cooperation and sacrifice by newly elected leaders as well as by ordinary citizens.

These transformations have also, no doubt, highlighted the role of the university in society. The university provides a source of ideas that may help shape the outcomes of political and social change. It allows candid discussion and open debate of many of the most vexing issues at the heart of political and social change and, in doing so, provides a measure of legitimacy for the resulting conclusions. Beyond its immediate benefits, a strong higher education system is vital to the long-term intellectual, financial, cultural, and even spiritual health of the nation. The university provides opportunities for dialogue, research, education, and outreach. An effective higher education system provides a safe space for dialogue in which students and scholars can entertain new, unconventional ideas unfettered by the demands of the political, social, or cultural arenas. Not only does it create this space for research and discourse within the country, it also serves as a portal through which to access the global academic community and its accumulated knowledge. Finally, the university prepares young people to be thoughtful citizens, public servants, financial innovators, creative artists, and insightful theologians. An effective higher education system is thus intrinsically tied to the health and wellbeing of the nation.

In order to be able to provide these many benefits, a university system must be safe and free. Academic freedom must be guaranteed for every professor and every student. The state must recognize and safeguard the autonomy of the university, without which

the university cannot fulfill its obligations to the nation. Violence and coercion have no place on the campus, or in the unfettered pursuit of knowledge. This is the bedrock principle of the university.

Yet beyond this principle, academic values are not clearly defined by any specific set of laws, codes, or agreements, and are certainly not to be forced upon an unwilling society. Although the international community does offer valuable, comparative experience and recommendations for how these values may be implemented, it is critically important for there to be a local discourse. Each university, nation, and region, as well as the world as a whole, must engage in an ongoing discussion about the role of the university and the balancing of the values necessary to its success. These values include not only academic freedom and institutional autonomy, but social responsibility, equal access, accountability, and transparency. The discussion must be inclusive and representative of all sectors of society. Rights must not be afforded to scholars of a particular ideology while being denied to others. Inclusivity ought to supersede the political nature of any debate in order to ensure that the debate can happen at all. The robust, open discussion that results is a sign of a healthy, vibrant higher education sector that is contributing to society. The absence of such discussion is not only an indication of a lack of academic freedom; it is a sign of serious weakness for any nation.

The Middle East and North Africa, and Tunisia in particular, are important venues for open discussion about academic freedom. The "Arab Spring" has caused many states to rethink the relationship between the university and the nation. Tunisia has historically enjoyed one of the most robust university systems in the region. Yet, like much of the region, Tunisia also has a history of suppression in universities. Both anti-authoritarian and Islamist thought were suppressed under the previous regime, not only in universities but throughout society. Today, with the advent of democracy, there is an opportunity to learn from this shared history of repression. Yet there are early signs that the lessons of the past are already being forgotten; some of those who bore the worst of the oppression have begun to rely on violent protest and intimidation to overwhelm their political and ideological opponents, rather than engage with them through reason and discourse. This has included intimidation of the higher education sector. If such acts persist, if academic freedom and institutional autonomy are not protected, the universities cannot fulfill their role. The outlook for the nation, and the region, will suffer. On the other hand, if the dialogue produced by this conference and report, along with the work of others in the region, is effective in maintaining an open, secure university space, the relationship between the university and the nation will be strengthened, and will produce an array of benefits for Tunisia and for the region. We hope that the discussion and recommendations provided in this report will contribute to the achievement of this very important goal.

**Lisa Anderson** President, American University in Cairo Co-Chair
NYU Center for Dialogues: Islamic World-U.S.-The West

**Jonathan Fanton** former President, New School MacArthur Foundation
Chairman of the Board
Scholars at Risk

Habib Kazdaghli, Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Letters, and Humanities at the University of Manouba

## Introduction

In the fall of 2011, The Center for Dialogues (CfD) and the Scholars at Risk Network (SAR) were approached by several Tunisian scholars and university administrators who were concerned about the trajectory of the university system in Tunisia and the greater region. In particular, they were concerned about the developing situation at the University of Manouba as well as at several other major Tunisian universities. They were worried that the increasing pressure on Tunisian universities was contributing to a breakdown of the university system, and that many institutions, including Manouba, were no longer able to fulfill their duties. The two organizations were asked not to speak for a particular side in a political debate, but instead to ensure that the necessary dialogue could occur.

That summer, SAR traveled to Tunisia to discuss the crisis with leading figures, including the President of the Republic, the President of the National Constituent Assembly, the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, and representatives of Tunisian higher education and civil society. The conversations made clear that Tunisian universities faced significant risks. Universities had become the targets of intentional, physical intimidation. Outside groups, especially Salafist protestors, organized demonstrations at the campus that continued for weeks, disrupting educational and administrative functions. Not merely peaceful gatherings of students responsibly exercising their rights to express their views, the demonstrators crossed the line from expression that is permissible, however inconvenient, to intimidation, threats, and violence. Administrators and professors were physically prevented from carrying out their duties and in some cases were assaulted. Students and staff were harassed while entering the campus and feared for their safety. On multiple occasions demonstrators violated campus property, including removing the Tunisian flag that hung above the main gate. On the whole, rather than foster an informed examination of articulated demands, the demonstrators created a climate of fear and insecurity that drove many students and some faculty away. In November 2011, and again in March 2012, the university administration was forced to suspend operations, denying students of a full year of classes and violating their right to education. Despite the repeated pleas of campus leaders, the government refused to intervene, allowing the situation to escalate. Instead of sending a clear message that violence and intimidation have no place in society, let alone in the academic community, the state's weak response signaled it would not act quickly to guarantee the security of the university and its members.

Although the crisis at Manouba was perhaps the most extreme case in Tunisia, the higher education system throughout the region faces similar pressures. After meeting with colleagues from many Tunisian universities, including El Manar, Tunis, Sousse, Sfax, and Manouba, as well as representatives from universities in Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Libya, and Turkey, it became clear that universities throughout the region were experiencing heightened levels of intimidation. When our Tunisian colleagues put forth the idea of hosting an international conference about the issue, representatives from throughout the Arab world welcomed the opportunity to discuss the role of higher education in democratic societies. To accomplish this goal and to foster a sincere international dialogue, we agreed to co-organize an international conference on academic values to be hosted by the University of Manouba. On February 21-22, 2013, with the greatly-appreciated support of the Tunisian Observatory for the Democratic Transition and the University of Manouba, the NYU Center for Dialogues: Islamic World-U.S.-The West (CfD), and the Scholars at Risk Network (SAR) convened the international conference, The University and the Nation: Safeguarding Higher Education in Tunisia & Beyond. The conference brought together scholars, university administrators, and civil society leaders from Tunisia, the Arab world, and the West to discuss the frustrating situation facing Tunisian universities and the greater case for academic freedom. Over the course of two days, experts and practitioners engaged in a rigorous dialogue, which resulted in many important insights and several concrete recommendations for the improvement of the university system in Tunisia and the MENA region.

The conference provided a clear consensus on the need for continued dialogue about these vital issues at this critical time. The participants agreed that guarantees of academic freedom were much more viable if the universities developed strong national and international ties. Networks of universities like the Scholars at Risk Network help to ensure that no university or scholar would be left to navigate pressures alone. Active links between universities and scholars around the region and globe can help to increase the level of accountability of universities, governments, scholars, and students, strengthening the higher education sector for the benefit of all.

SAR and the CfD are working to maintain the dialogue by several means. We are keeping in contact with university administrators and scholars throughout the region, seeking to develop ever more far-reaching and effective networks, and considering the creation of an "Arab Spring" section of the global Scholars at Risk Network. Through this network, we are establishing a clearinghouse for shared information on pressures on the university space. Similarly, we are developing a set of principles for protecting higher education from the worst attacks, with an emphasis on encouraging states to recognize their responsibility to protect the university space while respecting core values of academic freedom and institutional autonomy. We also hope to continue the work started in Manouba by hosting a second major international conference in the region, and have accepted the kind invitation of our Egyptian colleagues to meet in Egypt in 2014. This next conference will expand and deepen the conversation begun at The University and the Nation, and hopefully find new ways to make academic freedom and quality higher education a reality throughout the region.

**Mustapha Tlili**
**Founder and Director**
**NYU Center for Dialogues: Islamic World-U.S.-The West**

**Robert Quinn**
**Executive Director**
**Scholars at Risk**

## Executive Summary

The conference, *The University and the Nation,* was organized in order to foster a discussion about academic values and the relationship between the university and the nation in Tunisia and the surrounding region. The organizers were especially concerned with recent incidents of intimidation and violence against universities and university personnel, most notably at the University of Manouba. The nature of the conflict between secularism and Islamism, which had engulfed the university, had manifested a situation in which violence had denied students, faculty, and administrators their right to freedom and security in education. The conference, hosted at the University of Manouba on February 21-22, 2013, was designed to foster regional dialogue about academic values and to find ways to promote such values in newly democratic societies. It featured over 30 expert panelists, representing academic institutions and civil society organizations from Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Turkey, and the United States. Panelists discussed the situations facing their own universities and nations, and then offered observations and conclusions to the conference. The conference sought to provide an in-depth look at the Tunisian experience and to use the international delegation to draw parallels between Tunisia and the region at large.

The conference focused on four primary discussion points. First, it examined the link between the university and the nation, and specifically the importance of the university to the nation. Panelists were asked to consider the ways in which a university system was connected to the national wellbeing and how universities might seek to contribute to the nation. Second, the Tunisian participants were asked to discuss the status of academic freedom and university governance in Tunisia, both with regard to the University of Manouba and also taking into account incidents at other universities and in the national political sphere. Third, international participants were asked to provide related insights concerning academic values in other countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Participants worked to determine whether similar trends existed throughout the region or if countries and universities had found themselves in unique situations. Finally, the panelists were asked to propose possible solutions and to identify opportunities for regional and global engagement. By considering these four areas, the conference intended to use both a narrow and a wide lens to analyze the issues facing universities in the region.

Throughout both days of the conference, four major themes persistently arose. First, the panelists wanted to discuss specific threats to universities, especially cases in which intimidation or violence had occurred. The panelists identified many cases of explicit violence at universities, including in Tunisia, Libya, and Turkey, as well as a disturbingly high level of interference in university affairs by government officials, with cases cited in nearly every country that was discussed. While the panelists generally agreed that the cases of physical violence required the most urgent response, the panelists also argued that a hostile relationship between the university and the government, characterized by a high level of government interference, should be recognized as an unacceptable threat to the university space.

Second, panelists consistently wanted to talk about academic values. They argued that a vibrant university system was both good for the health of the nation and necessary for human rights, and that this was only possible in the presence of an ongoing dialogue about academic values. While there was some debate about what academic values might be, the panelists largely agreed that the current value system was lacking.

Third, university administrators were especially concerned about the deteriorating level of university autonomy during the "Arab Spring." They suggested that universities and governments need to cooperate to improve the level of institutional and fiscal autonomy in the higher education sector.

Finally, the participants were eager to discuss the role of Islam at the university, especially because this issue had ignited the conflict at Manouba. Many speakers felt that the university should be protected as a neutral, secular space, while others contended that a predominantly Muslim university should be accommodating of Islamist demands and should be accepting of public displays of conservative Islam. Although this was fervently debated, the conference was unable to reach any conclusion about the issue. A further discussion of these four central themes can be found in the subsequent sections of the report.

The conference provided several chief recommendations to improve the case for academic values in the region targeted at university administrators, scholars, students, civil society organizations, and governments. Participants were interested in promoting the governing and financial autonomy of universities. They were also interested in providing guarantees for the security of institutions, even using government intervention when necessary to protect the university, provided it was done in a way that strengthened and did not undermine the autonomy of the institution. The participants also felt a need for the legal system to provide greater guarantees of personal freedoms for scholars. In the case of Tunisia, the participants felt that the guarantee of academic freedom needed to be specifically included in the constitution. Finally, the participants reaffirmed a need for a continued national, regional, and global dialogue to monitor the situation at universities and to press for a stronger understanding of academic values.

Based on the recommendations provided by the delegates, the co-organizers have also included a set of recommendations supported by this report. Although these recommendations target a variety of actors, they push for progress in four main areas. First, they require protection for the university space. Second, they demand a legal framework for academic freedom, both at the national level and via international norms and law. Third, they promote transparency in university governance and seek to maintain open lines of communication between relevant actors. Fourth, they propose continued dialogue about the issues raised at the conference, including a continued search for innovative solutions to address evolving problems. The co-organizers urge all who read this report to carefully consider the ideas it proposes and to lend their support to these core recommendations.

Rabaa Ben Achour, President of the Tunisian Association for the Defense of Academic Values

Robert Quinn, Executive Director of the Scholars at Risk Network

# Opening Ceremony

**The University & the Nation, at this time, in this place…**

**Mustapha Tlili,** Founder and Director of the New York University Center for Dialogues: Islamic World-U.S.-The West, opened the conference with reflections on the aftermath of the Tunisian revolution and subsequent upheavals throughout the country. After a brief period of hope at the insurrection against secular dictatorship, Tlili became concerned about the rise of a new dictatorship. He affirmed that no free person or the international community should remain indifferent to the violence committed by fanatics. He alluded to the destructive results of religious extremism in Algeria and Mali and the "price in blood and tears" that these countries had to pay.

Over the past two years, intimidation and violence against Tunisian intellectuals, artists, and opposition figures have increased under Tunisia's new democracy.[2] Tlili warned against the double-speech and cleverly hidden intentions of political figures, which "should make intellectuals more vigilant and alert to what George Orwell called in his book, Animal Farm, 'the diabolic dangers of political hypocrisy.'" At such an important moment in a democratic transition, Tlili felt that it was imperative to foster critical thinking that would lead to increased democratic accountability and stability in Tunisia. With this in mind, he encouraged the conference participants to engage in rigorous dialogue and to effectively deal with the issues at hand.

**Robert Quinn,** Executive Director of the Scholars at Risk Network (SAR), thanked the dean of Manouba, the co-sponsors of the conference, the participants from Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Turkey, France, and the U.S., and members of the Tunisian higher education community. Quinn expressed his delight to be back in Tunis at the University of Manouba, which he had visited in June 2012 to assess the situation at the university. He then briefly discussed the history and principles of his organization, noting that Scholars at Risk was founded to support the higher education sector and to protect "the space in society for thought and exchanging ideas freely and safely." The network has grown to encompass over 300 universities in 35 countries.

The network is especially interested in the Tunisian academic atmosphere because of the critical moment at which this debate took place. Recent incidents of intimidation and violence against the University of Manouba, and Dean Habib Kazdaghli in particular, highlighted the unstable environment threatening Tunisian higher education. Quinn recounted how the campus had become a center of conflict after the faculty clarified a policy that prohibited the wearing of the niqab in university classrooms and during exams, while permitting it in other campus spaces.[3] Quinn noted that while his organization had no position on the issue of the niqab, the network became concerned when protesters crossed the line from peaceful expression into physical intimidation and violence. SAR grew concerned by the apparent unwillingness of the state to ensure the security of the campus space, and especially when the threat of imprisonment was brought against Dean Kazdaghli, who had been the defender of academic freedom and the institution.[4] Quinn expressed his hope and confidence that the charges against Kazdaghli lacked merit. In light of the academic atmosphere in Tunisia, Quinn called for greater solidarity with Tunisian scholars, and noted that the organization of the conference was in part a demonstration of the support and solidarity of the SAR network. But beyond this, Quinn noted, the conference provided an opportunity to move beyond recent incidents and to broaden the conversation by sharing SAR's experiences with scholars in other parts of the world and by inviting scholars and university leaders from around the region to join in the discussion.

Quinn concluded his remarks by emphasizing the mutually-dependent and mutually-beneficial relationship between the university and the nation. Great nations need great universities, because the university is the key to economic, political, social, and cultural development. But to be great, universities need security, autonomy, and academic freedom. Only the state can ensure these rights. Only by working together can the university and the nation reap the full benefits of quality higher education. Quinn promised that the conference would not be SAR's final initiative in Tunisia or the greater MENA region, indicating the he looked forward to learning from those present, to better understanding their experiences and the challenges that they have faced during the "Arab Spring" and its aftermath, and to finding fruitful ways for the SAR network to be helpful in the future.

**Moncef Ben Slimane**, President of the Forum Universitaire Tunisien (FUT), gave a brief description of the history and goals of the FUT. It was founded in 2011, following the revolution, with a "mission to provide opportunities for debate and to diagnose the problems facing universities after the revolution." It held three major public forums in March and May 2011, and February 2012. The FUT has sought ways to promote academic freedom, especially in the new constitution, and has looked for links between academic freedom and autonomy of the university. Slimane believes that Tunisian universities should push for further development of the social sciences, which he defined as any areas of study that bring people together to reflect on society and to push for new solutions. Finally, Slimane lent his support to the faculty of Manouba and Dean Kazdaghli for their actions during the crisis at Manouba.

**Rabaa Ben Achour,** President of the Tunisian Association for the Defense of Academic

Values, began her address by expressing her respect for Dean Kazdaghli and for Khaoula Rachidi, a student at Manouba who was to be honored at the conference. She then discussed her organization, saying that the Association was established in defense of academic values, and that it was open to journalists, artists, and "anyone for defending the rights of universities." To Achour, academic freedoms are inalienable human rights. She even added that others who disagreed were still welcome to participate in the Association, because dialogue was a key goal of the Association. Ben Achour concluded with a hope that the conference would help improve openness to other cultures, because universalism in Tunisia was being destroyed. The revolution marked an opportunity for a shift in university culture. She called for universities in Tunisia to be an opportunity to spread a "universalist" culture based on the fundamental connections between people.

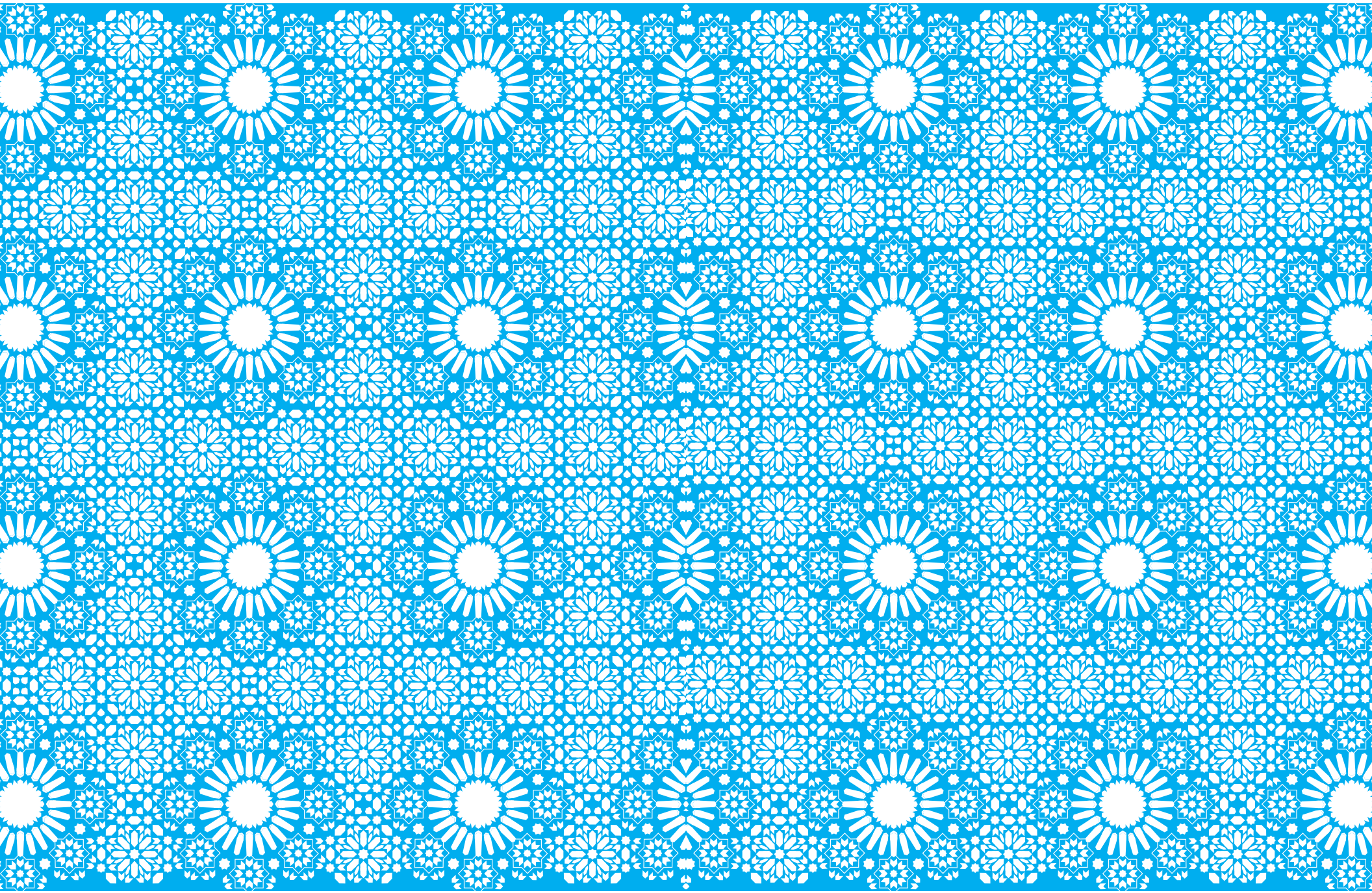
**Hamadi Redissi,** former President of the Tunisian Observatory of Democratic Transition, began his remarks by announcing that he had received death threats in recent weeks following the assassination of Tunisian opposition leader Chokri Belaïd. "Belaïd became a symbol of resistance and free thinking amongst Tunisian scholars because he used to belong to the Tunisian university prior to his involvement in politics," added Redissi.[5] Redissi called for a cessation in violence in the public sphere and asked for the conference to contribute to public security. He suggested that this marked a tragedy but also an opportunity for dialogue in a key moment in Tunisian history.

**Habib Kazdaghli,** Dean of the Faculty of Letters, Arts, and Humanities at the University of Manouba, who had opened the conference and was presiding over the opening session, indicated that he, like Redissi, had become a target of death threats following Belaïd's murder. Kazdaghli concluded the opening ceremony by asking the conference to dedicate a moment of silence to remember Chokri Belaïd, whom Kazdaghli dubbed a "hero of freedom." The dean announced that the university's Scientific Council had decided to dedicate a part of the university yard in commemoration of Chokri Belaïd.

Kazdaghli then introduced a second "hero" to the conference. "In this battle for freedom, amongst the victims and threatened scholars there is a simple student who stood as a hero to defend the Tunisian universities," Kazdaghli declared. Khaoula Rachidi, a student at the University of Manouba, gained national popularity in March 2012 after she attempted to stop a Salafist from desecrating the Tunisian flag flying above the university. The Salafist had intended to replace it with the black Salafist flag. The Salafist crowd quickly turned violent and scaled the building from which the flag was flying and pushed Rachidi from the roof. Kazdaghli ended the session by honoring Rachidi for her heroic act and unprecedented courage, and calling for the conference to foster critical thinking and citizenship. The university presented Rachidi with a photograph to commemorate the moment. The same photograph now hangs above the school's main conference hall.

2 Further discussion of the post-Revolution politics of Tunisia can be found in Appendix II.
3 The niqab is a face covering that reveals only the eyes. It is worn by women in some conservative Islamic sects. It was illegal in public in Tunisia until the revolution in 2010. Since then, certain groups have pushed for its revival.
4 The events at the University of Manouba are further discussed in Appendix II.
5 Further information about the assassination of Chokri Belaïd can be found in Appendix II.

Hamadi Redissi, former President of the Tunisian Observatory of Democratic Transition



# Session I

## On the importance of the University to the Nation

The first session focused on the importance of the university system to the health of the nation. The speakers discussed the relationship between the university and the nation with a focus on the ways in which a strong university system could benefit a nation. The panel featured prominent scholars and universities administrators from Tunisia, the Mediterranean region, and the West.

The discussion began by reflecting on the link between academic freedom and democracy. One panelist drew on experience working in 60 countries around the world, advocating on the behalf of scholars facing human rights violations. In particular, the panelist recalled the case of current Tunisian President Moncef Marzouki. As a scholar in the later 1990s, Marzouki had been harassed and prosecuted by the former regime of Ben Ali. Marzouki's case gained international attention due to the work of institutions such as the Scholars at Risk Network and Human Rights Watch. According to the speaker, the increased pressure on the regime eventually led to Marzouki's release. The panel agreed that the role of such institutions was key in seeking justice for scholars regardless of political ideology.

One panelist argued that international civil society ought to defend the rights of both secular and Islamist scholars. Another panelist suggested that Tunisia was on the precipice of "a new dawn for scholars," but that this was only a possibility if academic freedom was included in the new constitution. The panelist emphasized that article 30 coupled with articles 18, 28, 29, and 36 in the Tunisian draft constitution provided a solid starting point.[6] The articles enumerate the rights of universities, scholars, and students. Yet the panelists agreed that this was not enough. They asserted that the language of the constitution had to be simple and clear. They stressed that not only do guarantees on academic freedom need to be in the document, but also that the language and the political system should prevent the possibility of faulty interpretation. If the appropriate measures are taken, then the constitution will allow education to strengthen the democratic transition. One panelist argued that education provides a crucial foundation for democracy, and that education is not a luxury or an honor. It is a necessity.

The speakers agreed that high-quality universities seek to liberate, not imprison, the mind. Great universities are not an "ivory tower" but rather a bridge that connects the world in a global community of knowledge. One speaker used this metaphor to express solidarity with scholars in Tunisia and around the world and invited the participants to continue to work together in future projects to protect academic freedom.

The discussion then shifted to an examination of the political context for the academic freedom in Turkey, and especially the Turkish experience with educational transformation. One speaker highlighted the impact of religion on education and society by citing several instances in which Turkish universities had been shut down. In each case, religious pressures had resulted in the firing of faculty members. Occasionally, schools also witnessed violence against their scholars. The political system often stripped university administrators of the ability to defend their schools in such situations. Like Manouba, Turkish universities had faced significant debate around the issue of the niqab and other physical displays of conservative Islam. One panelist argued that the highly politicized nature of academics in some countries in the region allows politicians to promote universities according to their own background and desire. The panelist's discussion of the Turkish case demonstrated that academic freedom is often manipulated by some governments. One panelist claimed that the over-involvement of law and politics in academia allowed for the government to place itself above the scholar and the student. According to one panelist, this collectivist, anti-individual mentality is incompatible with academic freedom.

Another panelist tied the Turkish case to the political and historical context of the Tunisian revolution. The speaker reminded the conference that the collapse of Ben Ali's regime had been triggered by an educated youth movement and an effective use of social media. According to the panelist, science and technology present new opportunities for democracy. He called the revolution a continuity of Bourguiba's masterpiece of education and women's empowerment.

Yet the panel also agreed that both Ben Ali and Bourguiba had relied on undemocratic regimes that had failed to improve the long-term prospects of the country or to lay the foundations for an effective democracy. Now "Political Islam" was failing as well. This led the panelist to call for a neutral government composed of technocrats to lead the democratic transition. By relying on independent experts to guide the political context, the panelist was hoping to highlight the role of science in Tunisia. Considering this proposal, the panelists stressed the need for independence of universities, which "should not be controlled by any ideology, religion or political party." Yet, the panelists signaled some hope for the role of the university in Tunisia and the Arab world and argued that academia could offer practical solutions to develop democracy in the region.

Another speaker asked the panel to consider the longer history of the university and the nation. The panelist gave a brief history of the university system, citing Max Weber on the role of neutrality and the goal of reaching universal values at the university, as well as

discussing the mushrooming of universities in 12th-century Europe. The panel considered the point that the university could be an ideal that nations should strive for, and yet the nation faces many obstacles in achieving this ideal. The panelists argued that the university has to be autonomous relative to the state, the market, and theology. If it is autonomous, then the university can actually become a tool of the state or at least a tool to improve the state. The university can aid in maintaining collective memory and in reinforcing "the archiving of knowledge." On the other hand, one panelist warned of the possibility of co-option of the university by the state.

The discussion then turned to the role of politics in the debate. One speaker noted that many institutions in Tunisia had been marginalized in recent history, and the speaker had hoped that this would change under the new democracy. However, the speaker was concerned that a backward trend in thought had spread and that Islam was being instrumentalized in a negative way. The panelist also warned against threats from the outside as well, expressing the view that imperialism, especially from the United States, Europe, and Israel, had been designed to destabilize the Tunisian economy. The speaker argued that Tunisia should not allow foreign powers to control its universities or its economy and that the Tunisian people should determine their own understanding of academic values.

The panel finally shifted its focus to the recent events at Manouba. One panelist warned that the crisis could continue if it is not curtailed. The speakers presented several possible solutions to Manouba's problems. In the short-term, civil society organizations can help to establish strong values in the Tunisian political system. However, one panelist argued that these values have to be supplemented by university faculty; the faculty is responsible for the development of a new generation of free minds. To the speaker, Manouba represented a strong example of the development of intellectual capacity. The panelist called Manouba a "chapel of free minds." The university needs to be protected in order for the university to continue in this goal. Therefore, the speaker concluded that security is crucial to the health of a university.

The panelists then invited the audience to join in the debate. During the ensuing discussion, a panelist contended that religion is a central pillar of Tunisian and North African culture and should not be condemned outright. He was reacting to statements made by the session's panelists as well as others during the opening ceremony that argued for limiting the influence of religion in university life. In this panelist's view, universities should not be seen as impediments to religion but rather as bridges between ideologies. This issue resurfaced throughout the conference with many panelists and participants on both sides of the debate.

In summary, the central theme of Session I was the promotion of a healthy university system. The panelists offered differing views of a healthy system, but they generally agreed on four aspects that were necessary for the success of a university: 1) it must be "secure, independent, and free;" 2) it must be able to create an intellectual space that is connected to the nation, not isolated from it; 3) it must encourage a high level of citizenship and democracy; and 4) it must contribute to economic, cultural, and scientific innovation in a way that benefits the nation and potentially the world. The speakers agreed that a university can only be an asset to the nation if it is able to succeed in these four areas.

The speakers identified several potential threats to the university, including government dominance of the university system, religious extremism, and violence and intimidation on campus. It should be noted that there was little consensus about how these three threats should be addressed. However, most speakers agreed that the legal system needs to provide clearer support for academic freedom, that political figures should avoid interfering in academic affairs, that university governance should remain transparent and open to dialogue, and finally, that nations should encourage the development of a culture that celebrates the university.

6 An English Translation of the draft constitution may be found at http://www.wilsoncenter.org/islamists/article/english-translation-the-tunisian-draft-constitution

... that university governance should remain transparent and open to dialogue [and] nations should encourage the development of a culture that celebrates the university.

# Session II

## University autonomy and security in transition: Tunisian experience

The second panel explored Tunisia's experience with university values and governance during the democratic transition. The conversation featured several deans and administrators of Tunisian universities and representatives of Tunisian civil society. The moderator opened the panel by thanking the organizers of the conference and the panelists, and then gave some context for the discussion, explaining that the democratic transition had provided both opportunities and obstacles for the Tunisian university system.

The first panelist began by emphasizing the role of the state in defending university values. According to this speaker, the political transition had allowed for greater academic freedom in Tunisia, but the shift was not occurring as quickly as some had hoped. The speaker drew an etymological link between "university" and "universal," indicating that the goal of a university should be to create universal understanding. A more universal identity would lead to greater openness.

The discussion then shifted to the crisis at Manouba. One panelist characterized the events as a series of attacks led by religious groups against university values. The panelist applauded the resistance led by the dean, the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT), and Tunisian and international civil society. The speaker praised this alliance for helping to combat extremism and denounced the tactics used by the radical Islamists at Manouba. The speaker also criticized the Ministry of Higher Education's handling of the crisis, especially its expression of sympathy for perpetrators rather than defense of the institution. One panelist expressed outrage at the government's complacency towards the violations of academic freedom. Another panelist applauded a Tunisian university for recently naming one of its amphitheaters after Chokri Belaïd.[7] Acts such as this make the university system a center of resistance against violence.

Seeking to safeguard the security of higher education, the panel highlighted the importance of the constitutionalization of academic freedom. One panelist pressed for the government to make sure that the fight for academic freedom took place in the courts and through the constitution rather than through violent confrontations. Another speaker pointed out that the 1959 Tunisian Constitution did not protect academic freedoms. The speaker explained that a university's autonomy and freedom is based on its ability to research and publish. The panelist urged the state to support research by providing a climate of liberty that guarantees every citizen's right to information. A panelist proposed that this could be achieved by establishing an independent committee of "Higher Education and Scientific Research" to achieve political and legal solutions to the threats facing Tunisian universities.

The panel continued to discuss the call for legal reforms. One panelist criticized the previous draft constitutions presented by the Constituent Assembly, stating that the articles on academic freedom were incoherent and omitted both institutional autonomy and the neutrality of university space. The panel considered several changes to the draft articles proposed by the Forum Universitaire Tunisien (FUT) to address these problems. One speaker briefly described the FUT's other tactics for promoting academic values; at the time of the conference, the organization was preparing an anti-corruption project focused on the university and was beginning to study uses of university space in Tunisia. One speaker tied this to Dean Kazdaghli's "fight against fundamentalism" and reaffirmed the FUT's support for his case. The speaker added that Khaoula Rachidi, the student honored at the beginning of the conference, was a source of pride for all Tunisian women.

The panel then considered the possibility that the current legal system limits the efficiency of the university system in Tunisia. The speakers felt the current direction of the reform process was not correcting these problems. According to this panelist, rather than supporting academic freedom, the proposed article was designed to control academia. Another speaker asserted that many political elites were afraid of academia. The speaker was outraged to think that such important pillar of society was being brushed aside by the legal system. According to the speaker, it was clear that the state should not attempt to use the university as a political apparatus and that education should remain a well-defended sector of Tunisian society.

The floor discussion that followed marked perhaps one of the most exciting moments of the conference. Most participants agreed with the sentiment that the current draft of the constitution did not adequately defend academic freedom. However, some participants felt that neither did the language provided in the FUT's proposed article encompass all the rights that needed to be defended in the constitution. Several people argued that while the FUT's additions defended universities as a whole, the language did not clearly support the rights of individual scholars to research in a secure manner – it defended university governance while failing to account for the possibility of university corruption. On the opposing side, several speakers supported the FUT's proposed article, arguing that university autonomy by nature applies both to the institution and to its components. This means that while administrators are defended from corrupt political influence, scholars are also defended from corrupt administrators. Although this dispute was not resolved, it did make evident that the vast majority of the conference participants found the language in the draft constitution ineffective at guaranteeing academic freedoms.

7 The assassination of Chokri Belaïd is discussed further in Appendix II.

# Session III

## University autonomy and security in transition: Recent regional experience

The third panel again centered on university values and governance in transitional societies, but this time the focus was on the regional experience. The session featured professors and university administrators from throughout North Africa, with a special focus on states that had witnessed recent major political transitions.

The panel began by acknowledging the context of the "Arab Spring," but also by noting that the academic world was engaging in its own transition that may be related to but is separate from the political transitions in the region. One panelist outlined four particularly significant disruptions in the traditional academic environment. First, the panelist discussed the economic challenges facing universities. The panelist recognized that private sector funding was replacing the traditional public sector funding, which had caused many universities to shift their focus towards private sector goals such as professional, applied, practical, and vocational training. The speaker was concerned about the decreasing support for research and learning for its own sake. The speaker suggested that while professional training has its merits, it neglects the education in critical thinking that traditionally characterizes a university setting. Universities need to seek new sources of funding that promote intellectual thought and holistic education.

The second source of transition and disruption that the speaker identified was the ongoing transformation of educational theory. Universities are "no longer seen as the Ivory Tower." They are expected to engage directly with society through service learning, community engagement, and technology transfer. Furthermore, trends are shifting away from a "time-served" model of assessment towards a "competency-based" model that provides a more concrete understanding of student development.

Third, the speaker noted the generational change occurring in universities. The rapid development of technology means that the new generation has skills that their parents never had. They are impatient and ready to engage in the world. They often see universities not as"sacred spaces" but as "penal colonies" that prevent young people from accessing the real world. The speaker noted that it is challenging to manage an institution in which the faculty and administration are viewed as impediments to learning despite their intentions. Although the speaker was clear that universities are not actually the obstacles they are sometimes perceived to be, the speaker indicated that universities need to find innovative ways to deal with this problem, and to make it clear to students and to faculty that they share common interests.

Finally, the panelist acknowledged that the political transition facing the region also directly affected universities. The panelist recognized that although universities likely do not need to be fully revolutionized, they do need to admit that the same "mistrust, inexperience, and anxiety that are legacies of authoritarianism infect university life, just as they do every other sector of society." The speaker concluded by noting that the university system should not be quick to do away with conventional wisdom, but it should also be ready to explore the unconventional and to find new ways of dealing with problems. The freedom to engage in such controversial, even noxious thinking should be absolutely protected as universities continue to navigate the many pressures that they face.

Another panelist analyzed the political situation in Libya and declared that the region needed true democracy in which the university system is not dominated by the government. Under Gaddafi, the authoritarian regime had done everything possible to impede education, including limiting the autonomy of universities and denying access to scholarships abroad. The speaker observed that although Libya had undergone a revolution, the Libyan university system had remained unchanged. The Libyan state is unwilling to launch a reform process and instead continues to interfere with the needs of universities. According to the speaker, the only solution is for the Libyan higher education system to advocate for greater vision in educational reform. Education systems cannot afford to stagnate while the political systems around them transform.

Another speaker turned the discussion to Egypt by noting a small and yet significant event indicating reform. In the past, Egyptian universities had elected deans instead of using an appointment process. Most schools had since moved away from the election process. Recently, one university returned to this tradition and elected its president for the first time in recent years. The panelist deemed this a clear indication that a reform process has begun. Another panelist cited the new Egyptian constitution, which ensures that universities are independent from government control – a key academic freedom. However, even if universities are legally independent, they are still reliant on the Egyptian government for financial support. To one speaker, this meant that the government could still exercise some control over academia. The panelist recommended that administrators need to develop alternative means of finance, such as private donations and endowments, which can ensure that universities are not dependent on the state for their research. The panel agreed that fostering university independence was no easy task, and that although the Egyptian government was working on the problem, universities and others should seek their own alternative solutions. Another panelist stated that university autonomy extends

## The third panel contended that as political systems are reformed, so should university systems be transformed.

beyond fiscal autonomy – it also depends on the university's ability to produce scientific research. States tend to view universities as potential threats and thus seek to dominate the education system. "The state does not tolerate autonomy," the speaker continued, "and this is their weakness, their Achilles' heel."

One panelist applied this idea to the political context in Algeria. According to the panelist, the fragile situation that Algerian universities suffer from is due to a failure to establish solid academic traditions following national independence. Unlike previous speakers, the panelist considered private financing to be even worse than state financing because it could harm university credibility. Another panelist argued that the former authoritarian regimes in North Africa had made universities poorer and more crowded. This resulted in a lower quality of education. The despotic regime in Tunisia had excluded students and professors from the process of university governance. In the speaker's opinion, the needs of students and professors could be reconciled within the academic process by providing a clear model for accountability and governance. The panel called for critical thinking as a counter to tackle the discrepancy between diplomas and knowledge.

In summary, the third panel provided a regional context for the threats to academic freedom and other challenges facing universities throughout the region. As many states in North Africa undergo major political transformations, their universities experience similar and yet unique obstacles to academic freedom. The third panel contended that as political systems are reformed, so should university systems be transformed. In the aftermath of the "Arab Spring," universities could reinvent themselves in new, freer, more effective forms, or they could succumb to pressures and become dominated or obsolete. The two main threats that the panelists identified throughout the region were the over-involvement of government and financial instability. The panelists urged university leaders, scholars, and politicians to focus on discovering new solutions to the problems that they face and to creating university systems that are more vibrant and effective than they had been in the past.

Mustapha Tlili, Founder and Director of the NYU Center for Dialogues: Islamic World — U.S. — The West

# Session IV

## The University and the world: Global/ regional engagement and mutual support

The session on the second day of the conference focused on methods of regional and global engagement on academic freedom and opportunities for support between the conference participants and other sources. The two-part panel featured a range of scholars, university administrators, and civil society representatives from Tunisia and the surrounding region. The moderator opened the panel by briefly discussing the need for regional engagement on academic freedom.

The first panelist began by identifying the high level of unemployment amongst Tunisians with university diplomas. College graduates in the middle and upper classes were typically able to escape unemployment by relying on their contacts. Despite being equally qualified, lower class college graduates were often unable to find employment because they lacked an effective professional network. The panelist dubbed this the "inheritors' model" because well-to-do parents could rely on their own networks to support their children in a manner that is directly in opposition to social mobility. Another panelist noted that education had previously been a key tool in social mobility in Tunisia and lamented that this was no longer the case; unemployment among university graduates had reached 228,000, as opposed to just 160,000 prior to the revolution. Those who want to reform the Tunisian university need to remember that the social mobility provided by a healthy university system is vital to a successful economic model.

Other participants agreed that the "social elevator" had stopped working over the last two decades. Upward social mobility had become increasingly difficult. Prior to the economic downturn, a good education had sufficed to ensure employment, but this was no longer the case. One speaker claimed that education posed opportunities for Tunisia's future and the nation needs to make sure that education is once again a tool to combat social injustice and to solve the country's socioeconomic problems.

A panelist then spoke about the reform process for universities within the Egyptian political context, identifying four areas in which university reform can occur and academic values can be established. The first area is the expansion of the higher education system. Egypt boasts the largest higher education system in the region, and continues to grow at 3% per year. The Ministry of Higher Education had helped facilitate growth by prioritizing expansion. In 2004, Egypt only had 12 government and four private universities. By 2013, these numbers had grown to 23 government and 20 private institutions.

The second area is the connection that universities have to the revolution. Most of the protesters who sparked the Egyptian revolution had university degrees, which gave Egyptian universities a major role in the revolution. The second string of protests, two months following the fall of Mubarak, originated directly from the universities, giving them an even clearer role in the revolution. University professors were active in political parties. Students started their own movements, becoming the true instigators of change, both on the ground and through social networks.

The third area is the influence of globalization on Egyptian universities. The speaker pointed out the high number of private foreign universities and the many partnerships between Egyptian universities and foreign counterparts, including institutions in the United States.

The fourth area is comprised of the challenges that Egyptian universities face, including: 1) increasing the availability of higher education, 2) financing their activities, 3) more effectively preparing Egyptian students to face the demands of the employment market, and 4) achieving the independence of educational institutions. Another speaker declared that if the university system can proactively address these four challenges, Egypt can expect a bright future for its education system.

The second segment of the panel maintained the focus on methods of regional and global engagement and cooperation. The next panelist discussed the experience of a university in Egypt of which he is the President. He stated that the university was flourishing following the Egyptian revolution and that it often sends students to international conferences to provide cultural and professional opportunities. The university also encourages its teachers to gain an international perspective through travel. According to the speaker, academic freedom is highly promoted in Egypt. Universities are able to host a variety of conferences, regardless of political ideology.

Another speaker agreed that the Egyptian university system currently exemplified academic freedom. The panelist mentioned one university that is geographically far from Cairo and the center of the revolution, yet benefited greatly from the increase in autonomy provided by the revolution. Professors and even students were now encouraged to organize conferences to further the national dialogue on science, religion, and politics. To the speaker, this indicated a clear strength in terms of academic freedom in Egypt.

The following speaker painted a more pessimistic view of the situation in Libya as compared to Egypt. The speaker was frustrated that following the Libyan revolution, universities were still controlled by the state. Corruption is rampant in most institutions and the laws have not been adapted. One panelist argued that the

laws have to be changed before education reform is possible. The panel considered the establishment of an educational scientific higher commission that could achieve financial and administrative independence for educational institutions in Libya.

The panel's focus then returned to Tunisia. Panelists agreed that the education system in Tunisia is free, but that certain challenges need to be met. Tensions have grown in universities and are often left unresolved. One panelist called for an agreement between various key groups in Tunisia to determine responsibility for the protection of the university. Another speaker pointed to the threat to the field of journalism; even since the revolution, freedom of expression is sometimes limited, and journalists were often subject to arrest.

The moderator then opened the discussion to the floor, asking participants to focus on the opportunities for regional cooperation and the promotion of academic freedom. The debate about the role of Islam in the university quickly rose to the forefront. Several speakers agreed that universities in Muslim countries such as Egypt and Tunisia have the right and occasionally the responsibility to embrace Islam. This means that universities should remain open to other religious practice, but they should also be willing and able to cater to the needs of their large Muslim populations by allowing conservative Islamic dress and providing prayer space in the university. Others felt that the university's role is not to provide prayer spaces or engage in other Islamic activities; university administrators and scholars should guide the university based on academic, not religious, priorities. A university's doors should be open to all scholars and all students, so long as they are willing to engage in a dialogue based on secular terms. Censorship or even pro-Islamist hiring practices are unacceptable and are contrary to the university's responsibilities as an academic institution. Yet others provided a counter-argument, claiming that if a secular space denies a role for Islam in a university that is predominately Islamic, then the university is no longer acting neutrally. Several other participants were concerned about the possibility of censorship of subjects such as comparative religion, history, and literature, worrying that such subjects would be banned if seen as posing a threat to Islam. The debate grew quite heated at times and it was evident that there were many sides to the issue.

The floor debate also touched on several other topics. Some participants felt that it was important to develop mechanisms to solidify connections between universities and to help use university networks as a tool to achieve academic independence. Concern was also expressed over the phenomenon of "brain drain." Most participants confirmed the need to foster an atmosphere of critical thinking that nourished student analytic skills.

Overall, the discussion demonstrated that many universities throughout the region face threats to their independence and autonomy, especially due to increasing pressure from governments and extremist groups. Many participants indicated that they would support a clearer legal framework for the protection of academic freedom, and also that they viewed each other as potential resources in a regional and global network to push for greater guarantees of these rights. Panelists asserted that even when universities are not threatened, they ought to be engaging in the regional and global academic community for pedagogical purposes. Universities can rely on global partners to enhance the options for their students and their scholars. As governmental, religious, and financial threats develop, these connections become even more important. Universities threatened from within the country can turn to the global community for support. The global community can in turn put pressure on those who threaten the university. A greater level of engagement can thus lead to a higher standard of academic values throughout the region and the world. The panelists agreed that while particular solutions need to be developed based on local contexts, regional and global engagement can provide an opportunity to address any problem that a university might face.

*Participants, including Mhammed Al-Malki, Faculty of Law, University of Marrakesh, Morocco; Lisa Anderson, President, American University in Cairo; Ahmed Ounaies, former Tunisian Minister of Foreign Affairs; and Erhan Erkut, Rector, Özyeğin University, Istanbul, Turkey, listen during the conference.*

# Closing Remarks

**Habib Kazdaghli,** Dean of the University of Manouba, Tunisia, spoke following the final floor discussion. He reminded the conference that Tunisia had recently established its first democratic government, but now the real quest was for the nation to maintain its freedom. The way towards democracy is uncertain and rocky. Kazdaghli left the conference with a final question: is the constitutionalization of academic freedom enough to guarantee the security of the university, or does the nation need to take other measures to ensure liberties?

**Robert Quinn,** Executive Director of the Scholars at Risk Network, then delivered the closing remarks. He thanked the participants and the audience for their willingness to engage in rigorous dialogue. He thanked the organizers and sponsors for providing the opportunity. Quinn noted the importance of the relationships developed at the conference, especially between participants from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Turkey, and was enthusiastic about the potential of the continuing regional and global dialogue. Quinn noted that the discussions were candid and serious, starting appropriately with concerns about security. Security, Quinn emphasized, is the bedrock principle of the university: intimidation and violence have no place on the campus, and the state must ensure the security of the university space. Quinn noted that the dialogue then broadened to challenging questions about other core higher education values, including autonomy, accountability, governance, and social responsibility. He noted that much of the discussion revolved around how to balance these values in ways that respect all of them, rather than surrendering any one to another. Such discussion is the first step toward making concrete and lasting improvements in conditions. Finally, Quinn repeated the strong desire of the organizers and participants for follow-up activities, including finding ways to keep in contact with university administrators and scholars through effective networks, such as exploring the creation of an "Arab Spring" section of the global Scholars at Risk Network; inviting participation of academics and researchers in the region in a new SAR monitoring clearinghouse for information on attacks on the university space, so that universities and scholars will not feel isolated but instead will know they have the solidarity and support of colleagues; inviting higher education leaders and institutions to participate in developing a set of principles for protecting higher education from the worst attacks, with an emphasis on encouraging states to recognize their responsibilities to protect the university space while still respecting core values of academic freedom and institutional autonomy; and finally, continuing the discussions started at the conference by organizing a follow-up event in the fall or spring of 2014.

Jonathan Fanton, Chairman of the Board of the Scholars at Risk Network, and Meyssa ben Nahila

Amr Ezzat Salama, former Minister of Higher Education & President of Helwan University, Egypt





Dorra Ghorbal, Secretary-General of the Forum Universitaire Tunisien

# Recommendations

Great nations need great universities. Building on this simple fact, the NYU Center for Dialogues and the Scholars at Risk Network developed the following set of recommendations to strengthen the relationship of the university to the nation. These recommendations are based on the discussion at the conference and suggestions made by participants, and in particular recognize the central need to reinforce the university as a safe, secure space free from violence, coercion, and intimidation of any kind. Only then can universities and the nations they serve be truly great.

**I. Recommendations for States**

1) Recognizing that the unique contributions of the university to the nation depend upon real guarantees of security, autonomy, and academic freedom, States are urged to recognize their primary responsibility for protecting higher education communities and their members from attack, including:

a. Responsibility to refrain from attacking higher education communities or from complicity in such attacks;

b. Responsibility to protect higher education communities against attacks, and to do so in ways that are consistent with and supportive of institutional autonomy and academic freedom; and

c. Responsibility to prevent future attacks, including by investigating any attacks which may occur and holding perpetrators accountable.

2) States are urged to enact legal and administrative provisions that publicly recognize and implement these responsibilities, including but not limited to clear and concise guarantees of autonomy and academic freedom in constitutions and national legislation; in policy directives for ministries of higher education or other relevant ministries including justice and interior; and in budgetary allocations for higher education that support security, autonomy, and academic freedom.

3) States are urged to ensure such provisions and guarantees are implemented and enforced in a fair and consistent manner in keeping with internationally recognized due process standards.

**II. Recommendations for Higher Education Leadership**

1) Recognizing that the strength of the university depends not only on the State but on higher education leadership acting as first defender of the university space and promoter of university values of institutional autonomy, academic freedom, and social responsibility, higher education leadership is urged to ensure that universities are and continue to be "open" institutions, without ideological, partisan or sectarian bias, and inviting to intellectual expression of all kinds, limited only by academic merit and critique from within the community itself.

2) Higher education leaders are further urged to recognize the social responsibility of the university to the nation, to support and encourage bridges between the university, its members, and the nation, including through teaching, dissemination of research, and publications and public engagement activities of institutions, higher education leadership, and individual members of higher education.

3) Higher education leaders are urged to develop clear, transparent procedures for decision-making and governance within the university, and to develop open lines of consultation and communication with members of the university community and the nation generally.

4) Higher education leaders in particular are urged to recognize the unique responsibility and opportunity of the university to contribute to national dialogue on complex and challenging issues, such as the role of Islam and religious expression in the university and the nation, and to develop innovative ways to address such issues within the context of the university space and values.

5) Overall, higher education leaders are urged to play an active role in furthering the discussions fostered by this conference and the participants, including seeking opportunities to broaden the discussion to include peers not present at the conference, and to deepen the conversation by continuing it within their home institutions and their various networks and associations.

**III. Recommendations for Scholars, University Staff, and Students**

1) Recognizing the shared responsibilities of all members of higher education communities, scholars, staff, and students are urged to respect the values of the university including institutional autonomy, academic freedom, and social responsibility, including by:

a. Promoting the university as an "open" institution, without ideological, partisan or sectarian bias, and inviting to intellectual expression of all kinds, limited only by academic merit and critique from within the community itself.

b. Defending the university space and values against violence, coercion, or intimidation of any kind, by peaceful and responsible measures, including bringing concerns or complaints to higher education

leaders in a timely and non-violent manner that recognizes the rights of all members of the community.

c. Scholars, staff, and students are likewise urged to recognize the unique responsibility and opportunity of the university to contribute to national dialogue on complex and challenging issues, and to develop innovative ways to address such issues within the context of the university space and values.

2) Overall, scholars, staff, and students are urged to play an active role in furthering the discussions fostered by this conference and the participants, including seeking opportunities to broaden the discussion to include peers not present at the conference, and to deepen the conversation by continuing it within their home institutions and through their various networks and associations.

**IV. Recommendations for Other Actors**

1) Members of the public and others outside the higher education sector are urged to assist in strengthening the relationship of the university to the nation by recognizing and reinforcing the university as a safe, secure space free from violence, coercion, and intimidation of any kind, and in particular by:

a. Refraining from attacking higher education communities or from complicity in such attacks.

b. Assisting State and higher education leaders in protecting higher education communities against attacks in ways that are consistent with and supportive of institutional autonomy and academic freedom.

c. Assisting State and higher education leaders in preventing future attacks, including by assisting investigations of any attacks that may occur.

d. Defending the university space and values against violence, coercion, or intimidation of any kind, by peaceful and responsible measures, including bringing concerns or complaints to higher education and state leaders in a timely and non-violent manner that recognizes the rights of all members of the community.

2) Members of the public and others outside the higher education sector are further urged to engage with higher education leaders, scholars, staff, and students in supporting the unique responsibility and opportunity of the university to contribute to national dialogue on complex and challenging issues, to develop innovative ways to address such issues within the context of the university space and values, and to participate in such dialogue.

3) Overall, members of the public and others outside higher education are urged to play an active role in furthering the discussions fostered by this conference and the participants, including seeking opportunities to broaden the discussion to include peers not present at the conference, and to deepen the conversation by continuing it within their various networks and associations.

## Appendix I: Panelists

**Moncef Abdeljalil,** Dean, Faculty of Letters & Human Sciences, University of Sousse, Tunisia.

**Rabaa Ben Achour Abdelkéfi,** Présidente, Association Tunisienne de Défense des Valeurs Académiques, Tunisia.

**Osama Ibrahim Sayed Ahmed**, President, Alexandria University, Egypt.

**Nejib Bel Haj Ali**, Ancien Doyen, Faculté de Médecine, Sousse, Tunisia.

**Mhammed Al-Malki,** Faculty of Law, University of Marrakesh, Morocco.

**Lisa Anderson,** President, American University in Cairo, Egypt.

**Hmaïd Ben Aziza,** President, Tunis University, Tunisia.

**Karim Ben Kahla**, Directeur, Institut Supérieur du Commerce et Administration des Entreprises, Université de Manouba, Tunisia.

**Moncef Ben Slimane,** President, Forum Universitaire Tunisien, Tunisia.

**Mounira Chapoutot,** Professeur Émérite d'Histoire et membre de l'Académie Beit El Hikma, Tunisia.

**Hussein Eissa,** President, Ain Shams University, Egypt.

**Mabrouk El Bahi,** Doyen, Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines de Sfax, Tunisia.

**Erhan Erkut,** Rector, Özyeğin University, Istanbul, Turkey.

**Jonathan Fanton,** former President, New School University & MacArthur Foundation, U.S.A.

**Intesar Gabber,** Professor of International Law, University of Benghazi, Libya.

**Baccar Ghérib,** Doyen, Faculté de Droit, Université de Jendouba, Tunisia.

**Dorra Ghorbal,** Forum Universitaire Tunisien, Tunisia.

**Mustapha Haddab,** Professeur de Philosophie, Université d'Alger, Algeria.

**Mohamed Jaoua,** Professor, University of Nice-Sophia-Antipolis, France.

**Mostafa Kamal,** President, Assiut University, Egypt.

**Habib Kazdaghli,** Dean, Faculty of Letters, Arts and Humanities, University of Manouba, Tunisia.

**Noureddine Kridis,** Doyen, Faculté des Sciences Sociales et Humaines, Tunis, Tunisia.

**Fadhila Laouani,** Professeur de Littérature, Université de Manouba, Tunisia.

**Samir Marzouki,** Professeur de Littérature, Université de Manouba, Tunisia.

**Habib Mellakh,** Secrétaire Général, Association Tunisienne de Défense des Valeurs Universitaires, Tunisia.

**Sedeek Mesrati,** Professor of Maritime Law, University of Tripoli, Libya.

**Fadhel Moussa,** Doyen, Faculté des Sciences Juridiques, député à l'ANC, Tunisia.

**Robert Quinn,** Executive Director, Scholars at Risk Network, U.S.A.

**Hamadi Redissi,** former President, Tunisian Observatory of Democratic Transition, Tunisia.

**Amr Ezzat Salama,** former Minister of Higher Education & President of Helwan University, Egypt.

**Mustapha Tlili,** Founder and Director, New York University Center for Dialogues, U.S.A.

## Appendix II: The Tunisian Political Context

The revolutionary wave that swept through North Africa and the Middle East, known as the "Arab Spring," began in Tunisia in late 2010. Inspired by an act of civil disobedience in the Tunisian countryside, thousands of protestors took to the streets and demanded the removal of dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.[8] Since that moment, the country has succeeded in establishing a democratic government led by an elected president and a National Constituent Assembly (NCA.) The assembly, elected in October 2011, was charged with writing a new constitution while guiding the country through the transition. The Islamist party, Ennahda, proved to be the initial victor of the elections, claiming 41% of the seats, leading the coalition government.[9] At the time of the conference, Ennahda controlled most of the ministerial positions and could largely dictate the legislation passed by the NCA.

Following the revolution, the political context was characterized by a series of heated confrontations between Ennahda and the secular opposition. Ennahda has argued that it has a legitimate political mandate and that it should be given the right to rule, while the opposition has contended that the Islamists have tried to use their mandate undemocratically, including by perpetually delaying the promised elections.[10] The initial term for the NCA was to be only a year, but after a year and a half, the country has still seen no new elections. These political frustrations have exacerbated deteriorating economic conditions. The country's troubled economic situation, especially the high unemployment rate among youth, was seen as a major cause of the revolution. For most Tunisians, the political transition that followed has only worsened their economic condition. [11]

These issues came to a boiling point on February 6, 2013, when the popular opposition politician Chokri Belaïd was assassinated by unknown assailants. The country once again resorted to a wave of protests to demonstrate its frustration. Although few believed Ennahda was directly responsible for the crime, it was clear that many Tunisians felt the government had not adequately ensured the rule of law and had allowed for a culture of violence that led to Belaïd's assassination.[12] The crisis led Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali, a member of the Ennahda party, to demand the establishment of a temporary technocrat government until elections could be scheduled. When his party blocked his plan, Jebali resigned and was replaced by Ali Laarayedh, a prominent Tunisian Islamist. [13] The political situation in Tunisia continues to move slowly towards democracy, but it is constantly threatened by instability and political brinkmanship. Even as its rhetoric places the government on the path towards functioning democracy, the reality has failed to convince many Tunisians that the new government is close to success.

In this context, the University of Manouba has become a hotbed of tensions. In the fall of 2011, the school announced that the niqab, a face covering worn by women in certain conservative Muslim sects, would no longer be allowed at the school. In practice, the ban was only enforced during classes and exams. Even though only a small number of students at Manouba actually wore the niqab, the decision turned the campus into a target for protest and even violence. Professors were assaulted and students were kept from entering campus. On two occasions, the protests forced the school to shut down, cancelling more than a semester of classes. [14] First, when an outside protestor began to remove the Tunisian flag hanging above the school's main gate to replace it with a black Salafist flag, a student climbed the side of the building attempting to stop him. When she finally reached him, dozens of protestors stormed the roof, mobbing her, and eventually throwing her off the side of the building. The student, Khaoula Rachidi, survived with only minor injuries and was awarded a medal by the President of the Republic later that week.[15] The second event took place when two female protestors burst into Dean Habib Kazdaghli's office, scattering his papers and demanding full access for the *niqab*. Following the incident, one of the women filed charges against the Dean, accusing him of assault.[16] After more than a year of litigation, a Tunisian court acquitted the Dean, dismissing all charges against him and convicting the two students of attacking the property of another and of interfering with a public servant carrying out his duties. The students were sentenced to two months in prison with suspended sentences. However, the trial robbed Kazdaghli and Manouba of precious time and resources, preventing the university from operating within its rights. At the time of the conference, Kazdaghli's case was still ongoing.

8 Coll 2011.
9 Gamha 2011.
10 Merone and Cavatorta 2013.
11 Tlili 2012.
12 Merone and Cavatorta 2013.
13 BBC News 2013.
14 Human Rights Watch 2011.
15 Business News 2012.
16 Prince 2012.

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