

Consolidation of material dependence and women's economic empowerment Gafsa protesters prefer divorce over the abrogation of their economic rights Rihab Mabrouki

"Gender" discrimination, or known as discrimination based on gender, is a term whose concepts and forms appear in many settings, including economic, social, political and cultural. Although such discrimination can be practised against men and women, it is primarily directed only against women and girls.

Despite the changes that the world has undergone through the recent decades in ensuring women's human rights and enhancing their place in society, manifestations of discrimination continue to emerge in many practices that demonstrate the widespread violation of women's rights and seek to limit their participation in the labour market.

While various countries offer more opportunities for women to participate in the economy, options go far beyond girls or women to achieve benefits at societal and economic levels. What the Tunisian Government is seeking today is to deny unemployed women the right to employment and to restrict their livelihoods under the pretext that they are married and their husbands are working, which is a form of undermining women's economic empowerment and combating their universal right to enjoy their human dignity through the realization of their material independence.

What is "gender" discrimination?

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) defines gender discrimination as "any distinction, exclusion or restriction based on sex whose effects or purposes are to weaken or frustrate the recognition or enjoyment and exercise by women of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all fields regardless of their marital status and based on equality between them and men."¹

Women and Human Rights

On December 18, 1979, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which is the international Bill of Rights for women. The Convention entered into force on September 3, 1981, after being ratified by 20 states, including Tunisia. The Convention states: "The complete development of any country and the well-being of the world and the cause of peace require the equal participation of women and men, the maximum possible participation in all fields."²

Women's rights in Tunisia and the world, in general, are based on numerous legal references and international conventions supporting the presence of women in all vital sectors of countries. Among these Conventions; the Universal Declaration of Human Rights³; the Convention on the Political Rights of Women⁴ and other instruments calling for the universal realization of gender equality. In addition to the Tunisian Constitution⁵; this recognizes the equality of all citizens, men and women, and also in the Personal Status Code.⁶ Despite the domestic and universal legal arsenal protecting women's social and economic rights, abuses continue to be practised against them on several levels.

¹<http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/arabic/CEDAW473.pdf>

²<https://news.un.org/ar/story/2019/03/1028201>

³https://www.oic-iphrc.org/ar/data/docs/legal_instruments/Basic_IHRI/775283.pdf

⁴<http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/arab/b023.html>

⁵https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Tunisia_2014.pdf?lang=ar

⁶<https://wrcati.cawtar.org/preview.php?type=law&ID=10>

The absence of economic equality for women in Tunisia

Women in Tunisia, in the state of its Gafsa, in particular, face a broad fan of legal and social barriers that contribute extensively to a stark absence of economic equality. The category of unemployed women who hold university degrees is particularly vulnerable to this discrimination, especially in terms of government treatment of the unemployed.

However, women make up more than 50 percent of the holders of university degrees. Although they have participated in all forms of protest since the events of January 14 of demonstrations, sit-ins and hunger strikes, as well as in all the battles that have called for their employment and human dignity, and have been subjected to various forms of repression and physical and moral violence in the exercise of their legitimate right to demonstrate, their exclusion from the right to employment is an excuse on the pretext that their husbands have access to government jobs can only be a form of widening gender gaps in women's access to jobs that preserve their human dignity.



“Protesters from Gafsa filling a petition for collective divorce”

The decision to exclude married women from the right to participate in a regional debate that had been taken by the governor of the region under the pretext that they had been married to men working in the government sector in clear violation of their right to employment and the further consolidation of economic dependence between women and men.

A decision that was met with outrage among the disabled women participating in an operating sit-in in front of the state headquarters since February 2019 and that they denounced the abrogation of their economic rights led them to edit a petition for collective divorce.

In this context, Mariam, a 37-year-old woman from metlawi, Gafsa, a computer design specialist who has been unemployed for more than 15 years, claims: "Since the beginning of the sit-in of the unemployed High Ministers more than two years ago, we women have been an integral part of this sit-in and have participated in all positions and marches calling for employment. We have also been beaten and subjected to moral violence by the security forces. Our fundamental demand, which we never deviate from, was to be employed.

She adds, "It has been announced that candidates have been opened to participate in the regional debate of the Environment and Gardening Company. However, the decision of the governor of the region to exclude all women married to men working in the public sector from the debate has left an outrage among the excluded women. Although we tried to negotiate peacefully with the regional authorities in order to reverse this decision, the policy of procrastination and disregard was to answer all of our demands. Then we found nothing but the drafting of a petition for a collective divorce that included the names of the female protesters and which we adopted as a form of protest in order to draw the attention of officials and the authorities to our cause". Mariam reiterated their strong opposition to this unfair and discriminatory decision against them, which was taken without any legal conditions and denied them employment opportunities at the regional level on the grounds that the husband was working, which contradicts the Tunisian law and the International standards, calling for "taking into account the age and numb

Two Years' Struggle for Exclusion

Mariam is one of the thousands of women protesters who have been sitting-in in front of Gafsa's wall in the south-western of Tunisia for more than two years in an open sit-in for their right to work. Neither cold nor hot days have discouraged them from continuing their struggle and upholding their legitimate rights in the face of beatings and suppressions in the hope that the government will take their cause seriously and restore economic balances to those who suffer from poverty, marginalization and unemployment despite the richness of their wealth.

Even though the decision of exclusion taken by the regional governor is an excuse to provide other divorced, widowed or single women with employment opportunities, from a sociological perspective, it does not fall short of the box of the further consolidation of women's economic dependence today, despite their arrival at an academic level that allows them to work and achieve their material independence.

In this context, the social researcher at the Centre for Research, Studies, Documentation and Information on Women (CSID) confirms that the role played by women, whether productive, reproductive or community, their social status cannot be in conflict with their right to employment, nor can they be excluded as full-fledged citizens.

er of years of graduation as basic criteria for employment in order to ensure equal opportunities for all unemployed persons." Women and girls represent half of the world's population, and thus, half of its potential. The strengthening of their presence in social and economic life is a prerequisite for the advancement of civilizations, the development of the economy and the advancement of nations. Although the achievement of gender equality in all areas is central to the work of the Tunisian Forum of Economic and Social Rights, the Forum reiterates today's call for It and also emphasizes that the achievement of gender equality today is not a luxury, but the cause of an entire nation for which voices and movements have fought with a view to establishing a culture that believes in the effective role of women in the development of the economy and the advancement of society