

## **The LO/FTF Council in MENA**

### **Organisation of the MENA-team**

The LO-FTF Council in Copenhagen has the overall responsibility for the programme implementation. The day-to-day implementation, and the project cycle management of the programme in the MENA region, is carried out by the “low-key” LO/FTF Council sub-regional office in Cairo (with an Egyptian advisor and a part-time accountant/administrative assistant), and a regional advisor in Tunis.

The Cairo office operates on an entirely legal basis, yet, is intended to be “low key” due to the security situation for international organisations. The purpose with the Cairo office is to ensure the highest possible efficiency, effectiveness and flexibility of the programme implementation and to be able to provide a “demand-driven” level of technical assistance to the partners. The office furthermore acts as “neutral ground”, where the different TU organisations can meet to discuss conflictive topics.

The advisor in Tunis covers programme activities in both Morocco and Tunisia. The advisor is placed at the partner’s premises in Tunis and works closely with the programme steering committee in order to provide a “demand-driven” level of technical assistance to the partner. In order to monitor activities in Morocco, the advisor travels on a regular basis to the two regions in which the five partners reside. A local consultant is hired on an ad-hoc basis in accordance with implementation needs.

The LO/FTF Council office in Copenhagen (a part-time head of department, a programme coordinator and a part-time financial assistant) provides support in terms of political, technical, operational, financial and administrative issues. A fluent and close collaboration and coordination is ensured through weekly skype-meetings in the MENA-team and regular visits by the Copenhagen office to the three countries. The regional advisors work under the authority of the Regional Programme Coordinator/International Consultant, who in turn refers to the Secretary General of the LO/FTF Council.

### **Problems, partners and priorities**

Beginning in December 2010, massive and unprecedented popular revolts and demonstrations spread through a range of countries in North Africa and the Middle East. The uprisings started in Tunisia and were, by and large, incited by the mounting dissatisfaction with the economic situation, unemployment for especially young people and by demands for democratic reforms. The uprisings, which have popularly been named the “Arab Spring”, are changing the democratic scenery of many of the countries in the region dramatically. However, despite the standing positive developments the term “Arab Spring” is losing some of its positive connotation and the optimism has somewhat subdued. It has become clear that the new development is extremely unevenly grounded and fragile across the region, and has not yet materialised in a wide scope of reforms or job creation. Both Egypt and Tunisia face political violence and economic challenges affecting the industrial peace. In Tunisia, political violence has sent the country into a political crisis blocking progress in the transitional process and deteriorating the economic situation. In Morocco, the initial voices for change have never really taken root, and in Bahrain the democratic voices were silenced. And all this continues to be highly influenced by geopolitics in the region.

Therefore, the political and economic reforms for the creation of true democracies, checks and balances, accountability and national dialogue will take its time to be implemented, and the trade unions that have had an important role from the beginning, will continue to have an important role to play in the years to come to facilitate the national dialogue process, advocate for reforms and represent the workers of the region. To be able to do so, the new independent and democratic trade union structures that have emerged, changed and/or sprung out of the old state controlled entities will require continued support and technical assistance from international trade union experts if they are to take on the increasing role in the reform process of the MENA region and secure a fair disbursement of the wealth.

The main partners in the MENA-region are the independent and democratic trade union organisations, which are able to successfully represent the interest of the workers and which can be considered as change agents in the democratic development and reform processes in the region. Furthermore, the programme seeks to establish sustainable relationships for social dialogue with progressive employers' associations in the region.

The Danish Partners in the programme are primarily the Danish LO/FTF Council, Danish LO and FTF, selected Danish trade union federation, such as the Danish Teachers Federation (DLF), Danish Metal federation and trade union youth and women networks. In addition, the FIU Equality network and a Danish trade union youth network are involved in the programme.

Specific priority is given to the strengthening of women and youth who are often marginalised and have limited access to decision-making platforms within the trade unions as well on the national level. Specific focus is also given on anchoring activities with the resource base in the Danish trade union movement, specifically through the activities of the Danish-MENA dialogue.

### **Objective and strategy of the MENA-programme**

The overall long-term objective of the LO/FTF Council Partnership Programme in the MENA region is to contribute to industrial peace and social dialogue in the labour market and to the development of sound democratic trade union organisations, thereby contributing to economic growth and job generation. The programme is supported under the Danish-Arab Partnership Programme (DAPP) of Danida. The LO/FTF Council is among the 11 framework organisations receiving support under the DAPP, and the present programme "rolling-plan" is approved for the period of 2014-2016 with 19 million DKK.

The programme contains three components; 1) Awareness raising and protection of workers' rights by increasing the capacity of trade unions to advocate for awareness on freedom of association and protection of workers' rights; 2) Establishment of mechanisms of Social Dialogue for policy reform within social and economic development; 3) MENA-Denmark dialogue and partnerships at the political level as well as creating gender and youth networks to exchange experiences and best practices within Social Dialogue.

The strategy of the LO/FTF Council in the MENA region is rights-based and contains three focus areas:

- Improving the economic and social rights – through e.g. labour market reforms, Social Dialogue with the employers’ organisations and policy dialogue.
- Safeguarding the civil and democratic rights- through support to e.g. Trade Union development, to setting up trade union structures and establishing a legal observatory.
- Establishing partnership between Danish and MENA region stakeholders and opinion-makers from – or close to - the labour market, e.g. youth and women trade union networks, labour market experts and journalists.

The three focus areas are interlinked and connected. In addition, given the high level of uncertainty on e.g. the progress on reform processes and ability or constraints for our partners to operate, the intervention modality will be flexible. The specific interventions will be selected from within the three focus areas, and adapted to the circumstances