

AI Index: PRE 01/266/2011
25 May 2011

G8 leaders urged to champion human rights in the Middle East and North Africa

Leaders of the G8 industrialized nations should take bold action to support human rights in the Middle East and North Africa following a wave of pro-reform protests across the region, Amnesty International said today.

“The popular protests across the Arab world this year are a clarion call that people in the region are fed up with the status quo and want full recognition of their fundamental human rights,” said Malcolm Smart, Amnesty International’s director for the Middle East and North Africa.

“G8 leaders should seize this historic opportunity to ensure that protecting and promoting human rights is at the core of their engagement with governments throughout the region.”

The G8 is set to gather in France later this week, where they will discuss the promotion of democracy in the Middle East and North Africa in the wake of this year’s protests

The Prime Ministers of Tunisia and Egypt have been invited to participate in this year’s summit.

Wide-scale popular protests in both countries earlier this year overthrew repressive governments that had ruled for decades, sparking similar movements across the region, including in Bahrain, Libya, Syria and Yemen.

In all cases, ruling governments faced with protests have perpetuated a long-entrenched cycle of state repression and intolerance of dissent.

“The widespread, extensive and very serious human rights abuses being committed in response to the protest movements are just the tip of the iceberg – they illustrate a wider pattern of abuse borne out over decades of repression,” said Malcolm Smart.

“In its talks on the burgeoning changes in governance in the Arab region, the G8 must recognize that a sea change in how the region’s rulers see human rights and comply with their obligations is a necessary part of that narrative.”

Amnesty International also urged G8 leaders to call on Saudi Arabia, part of the “Group of 20” economically influential nations, to correct its abysmal human rights record.

“The Saudi Arabian government must also recognize and embrace the need for change, and make real strides to improve human rights,” said Malcolm Smart.