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Time for Tunisian political parties to deliver reform

Tunisians are still waiting for politicians to deliver on the fundamental change they have been promised, Amnesty International said today.

A month ahead of Tunisia's historic first elections since the fall of former President Ben Ali, the organization is asking all candidates in Tunisia's elections to sign a "manifesto" with 10 pledges to signal that they are serious about meaningful human rights reform."

Nine months after former President Ben Ali fled, many Tunisians still have little confidence in the authorities to deliver them justice, dignity and institutions they can trust," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa."

The upcoming elections are an opportunity for political parties to fulfil the promises that they have made and to move from rhetoric to concrete steps towards human rights and the rule of law. Only that way will the cycle of abuses that fuelled the protests of December and January be broken."

The ten pledges in the manifesto are:

1. Rein in the security forces

There must be a fundamental overhaul of all police forces and other law enforcement bodies. Their structure and chain of command must be made public and an oversight body established to independently and impartially investigate reports of abuse.

2. Combat torture and other ill-treatment

All officers involved in arrest, detention and interrogation must know that torture and other ill-treatment will not be tolerated. There must be regular, unannounced, unrestricted and independent inspections of all places of detention.

3. Call for an end to incommunicado detention

Detainees must have access in law and practice to the outside world, regularly and without delay, including to their families, lawyers of their own choosing and independent medical care.

4. Uphold the rights to freedom of assembly, association and expression

Laws criminalizing the peaceful exercise of these rights – including provisions of the 1969 Law on Public Meetings, the 1959 Law on Associations, the Penal Code, the Press Code, and the 2003 Anti-terrorism Law – must be repealed or brought in line with international law and standards.

5. Reform the Justice System

The independence of the judiciary must be upheld in law and practice. Everyone charged with an offence must have a fair trial by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal established by law, where the rights of defence are fully respected. Civilians must not be tried before military courts.

6. Investigate past abuses

There must be an independent, thorough and impartial inquiry into human rights violations under the rule of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. It must make recommendations to prevent future abuses and to provide truth, justice and reparation to the victims.

7. Realize economic, social and cultural rights for all

There must be no discrimination in people's access to essential public services, including water, sanitation and health care. Workers' rights and trade union freedoms must be upheld.

8. End discrimination

Legal provisions discriminating against individuals on the basis of race, colour, religion, ethnicity, birth, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, or other status, must be brought in line with international law and standards or abolished.

9. Stop violence against women

There must be a law on violence against women, including on domestic violence and marital rape. Provisions for dropping proceedings or penalties where an assaulted spouse withdraws her complaint, or where the assailant marries the victim in rape or kidnapping cases, must be repealed (Penal Code Articles 218, 227bis and 239).

10. Abolish the death penalty

The moratorium on executions must be upheld pending abolition of the death penalty.

- Amnesty International spokespeople are available for comment on the Tunisian elections. Call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566 or email: press@amnesty.org