keep Dreaming and Revolt

YOSRA FRAWES

Anne Klein Women's Award 2022

HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG

ANNE KLEIN WAS A LAWYER AND POLITICIAN, DEDICATED TO THE CONCERNS AND DEMANDS OF THE FEMINIST AND WOMEN'S MOVEMENT. OPENLY LESBIAN, SHE WAS A PIONEER OF THE FEMINIST CAUSE AND SERVED AS THE FIRST WOMEN'S SENATOR IN BERLIN'S STATE GOVERNMENT.

SHE DIED OF CANCER IN APRIL 2011.

IN MEMORY OF ANNE KLEIN, THE HEINRICH BÖLL FOUNDATION HAS CREATED THE ANNE KLEIN WOMEN'S AWARD. THIS ANNUAL PRIZE IS AWARDED TO WOMEN FROM AROUND THE WORLD, WHO ARE COMMITTED TO GENDER DEMOCRACY... WHO IS THIS YEAR'S AWARDEE?

BORN IN 1979, YOSRA FRAWES GREW UP IN THE TOWN OF JEDEIDA IN THE MEDJERDA VALLEY, 25 KM WEST OF TUNIS.

THE ELDEST OF SIX CHILDREN (FIVE GIRLS AND A BOY), SHE LEARNED VERY EARLY TO TAKE CARE AND TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR OTHERS.

AS A TEENAGER, SHE WROTE HER FIRST STORIES AND POEMS WHILE DIPPING HER TOES IN THE RIVER AND SPREADING HER WINGS TO BREATHE THE FREE AND FRESH AIR OF THE VALLEY.

I THINK MY AWARENESS OF OPPRESSION ESSENTIALLY STEMS FROM WRITING POETRY.

I WAS STILL IN HIGH SCHOOL WHEN ONE OF MY TEACHERS ASKED ME TO WRITE ABOUT NATURE TO CELEBRATE THE END OF THE SCHOOL YEAR.

INSTEAD, I DECIDED TO WRITE A POEM IN SUPPORT OF THE IRAQI PEOPLE WHO WERE LIVING UNDER EMBARGO AT THE TIME.

GROWING UP IN A RURAL ENVIRONMENT, SHE WAS AWARE OF THE WEIGHT OF CONSERVATISM AND BECAME A FEMINIST BEFORE SHE EVEN KNEW WHAT FEMINISM WAS.

BECOMING A FEMINIST WAS AN INTUITION. MY MOTHER WAS SUPPORTIVE OF MY CHOICES AND ENCOURAGED ME TO THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX.

AT THE OF AGE OF 19, SHE JOINED THE TUNISIAN ASSOCIATION OF DEMOCRATIC WOMEN (ATFD) TO TAKE PART IN THE YOUTH CLUB ACTIVITIES, WHERE SHE WOULD LEARN THE FOUNDATIONS OF FEMINIST ACTIVISM.

THINGS COULDN'T BE BETTER. IT'S A FABULOUS MEETING PLACE TO EXCHANGE IDEAS AND TO HOPE FOR A BETTER WORLD FOR WOMEN.

BACK THEN, SHE BEGAN TO RUB SHOULDERS WITH THE GREAT FOUNDING ACTIVISTS OF ATFD, SUCH AS SAFIA FARHAT, BOCHRA BELHAJ HMIDA, KHADIJA CHÉRIF AND OTHERS, FROM WHOM SHE LEARNED RIGOUR AND FEMALE SOLIDARITY. TWENTY YEARS LATER, YOSRA BECAME THE PRESIDENT OF THIS GREAT NATIONAL ORGANISATION.

YOSRA BECAME A LAWYER AND ADOPTED THE VISION OF ATFD FOR HER WORK.

SINCE BEN ALI'S ERA, THE ATFD HAS CONSISTENTLY MAINTAINED THAT THERE CAN BE NO JUSTICE FOR WOMEN IF THERE IS NO SOCIAL JUSTICE AT ALL.

AFTER OBTAINING A MASTER'S DEGREE IN BUSINESS LAW, SHE DEVOTED HERSELF TO THE DEFENCE OF THE MOST VULNERABLE MEMBERS OF SOCIETY: WOMEN, DISADVANTAGED FAMILIES AND OTHERS WHO HAD SUFFERED FROM HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS.

IN THE SAME SPIRIT, SHE ALSO JOINED ATFD'S LISTENING AND GUIDANCE CENTRE FOR WOMEN VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE.

OUR POLICY IS CLEAR; IT IS UP TO THE WOMEN VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TO TAKE THE FIRST STEP AND COME TO THE LISTENING CENTRE TO SEEK HELP. IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT THESE WOMEN ARE ABLE TO REPORT THE ABUSER AND TO CAST OFF THE BURDEN OF GUILT.

NATIONALLY AND REGIONALLY UNIQUE, THE LISTENING CENTRE WAS THE PERFECT PLACE FOR YOSRA TO USE HER INTELLECTUAL AND EMOTIONAL ENERGY TO PREPARE JUDICIAL DOSSIERS AND TO GIVE VOICE TO THE MOST VULNERABLE WOMEN.

A GROUP OF VOLUNTARY ACTIVISTS FROM VARIED CULTURAL AND PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUNDS EXAMINE THE CASES OF THE WOMEN VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE AND PROVIDE THEM WITH LEGAL ADVICE.

SHE LEARNED HOW TO LISTEN IN SOLIDARITY AND COMBINED HER COMPASSION AND HER JUDICIAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS TO ACCOMPANY WOMEN VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE THROUGH THE TUNISIAN LEGAL SYSTEM.

IT IS OUR JOB TO HANDLE THE CASES AND TO SUPPORT AND LEAD THE VICTIMS THROUGH THE JUDICIAL LABYRINTH.

YOSRA'S EXPERIENCE AT THE LISTENING CENTRE WAS FILLED WITH BOTH SUCCESSES AND FAILURES.

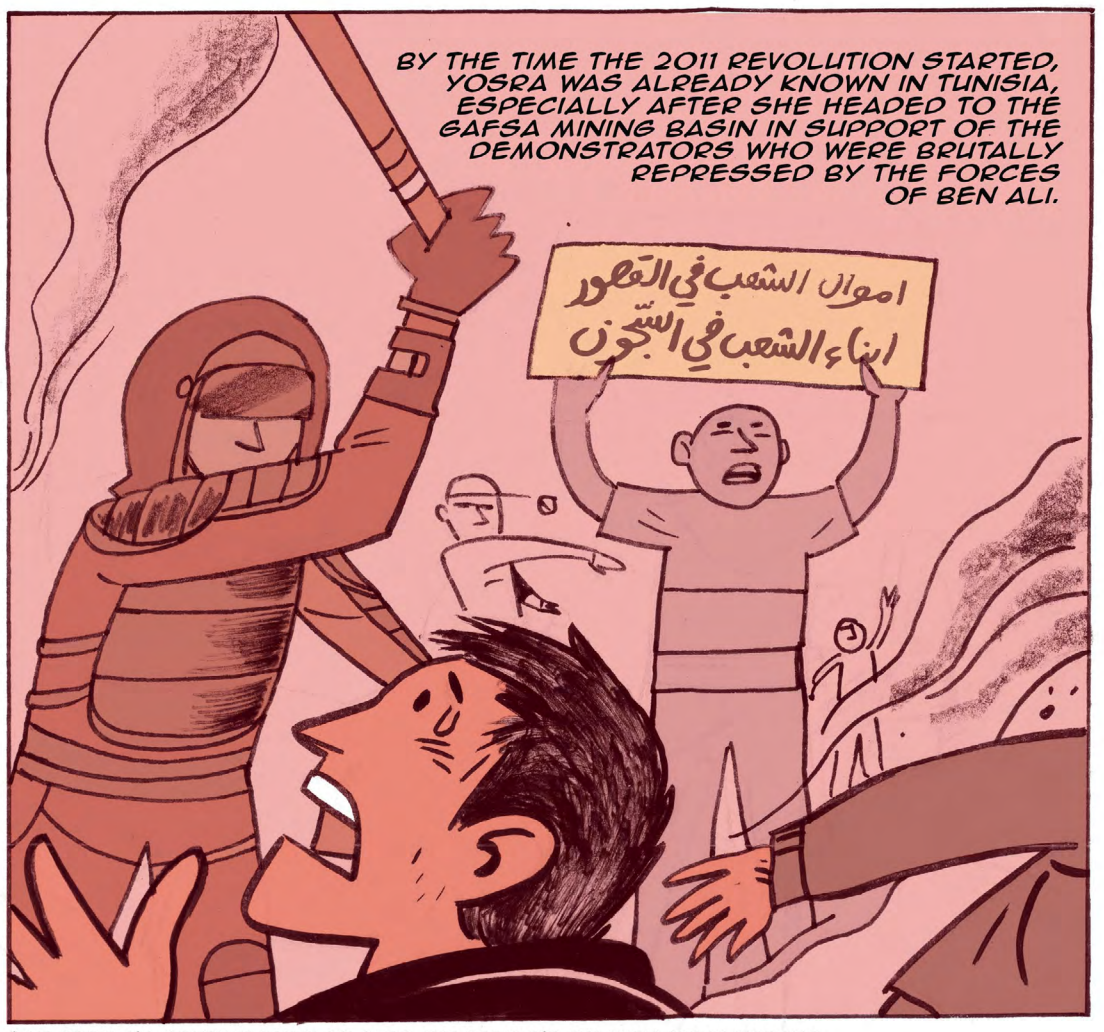
IT IS REALLY COMPLICATED! I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT TYPE OF LEGAL ACTION I SHOULD TAKE.

I'M GOING TO TELL YOU ABOUT ALL THE POSSIBLE OPTIONS AVAILABLE TO US UNDER TUNISIAN LAW, AND THEN WE CAN AGREE ON THE BEST WAY FORWARD.

SOME GIRLS AND WOMEN WON THEIR CASES, WHILE OTHERS NEVER RECOVERED FROM THE SUFFERING THEY HAD ENDURED.

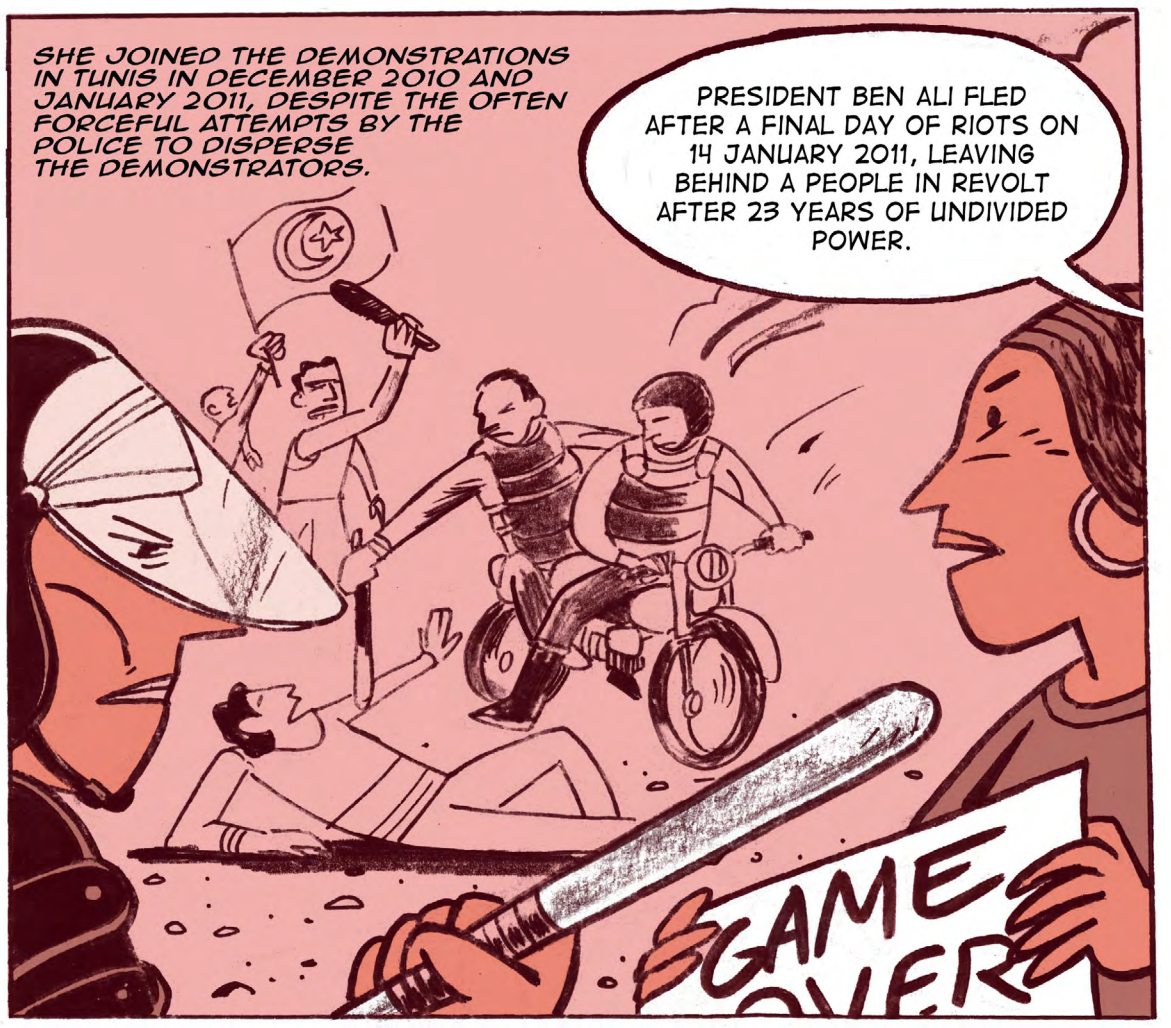
STANDING IN FRONT OF POLICEMEN AND JUDGES IS ALWAYS INTIMIDATING FOR WOMEN IN TUNISIA. MANY OF THEM FEEL DAUNTED BY THE CUMBERSOME PROCEDURES THAT ARE NOT SENSITIVE TO THE DISTINCT NATURE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASES.

BY THE TIME THE 2011 REVOLUTION STARTED, YOSRA WAS ALREADY KNOWN IN TUNISIA, ESPECIALLY AFTER SHE HEADED TO THE GAFSA MINING BASIN IN SUPPORT OF THE DEMONSTRATORS WHO WERE BRUTALLY REPRESSED BY THE FORCES OF BEN ALI.



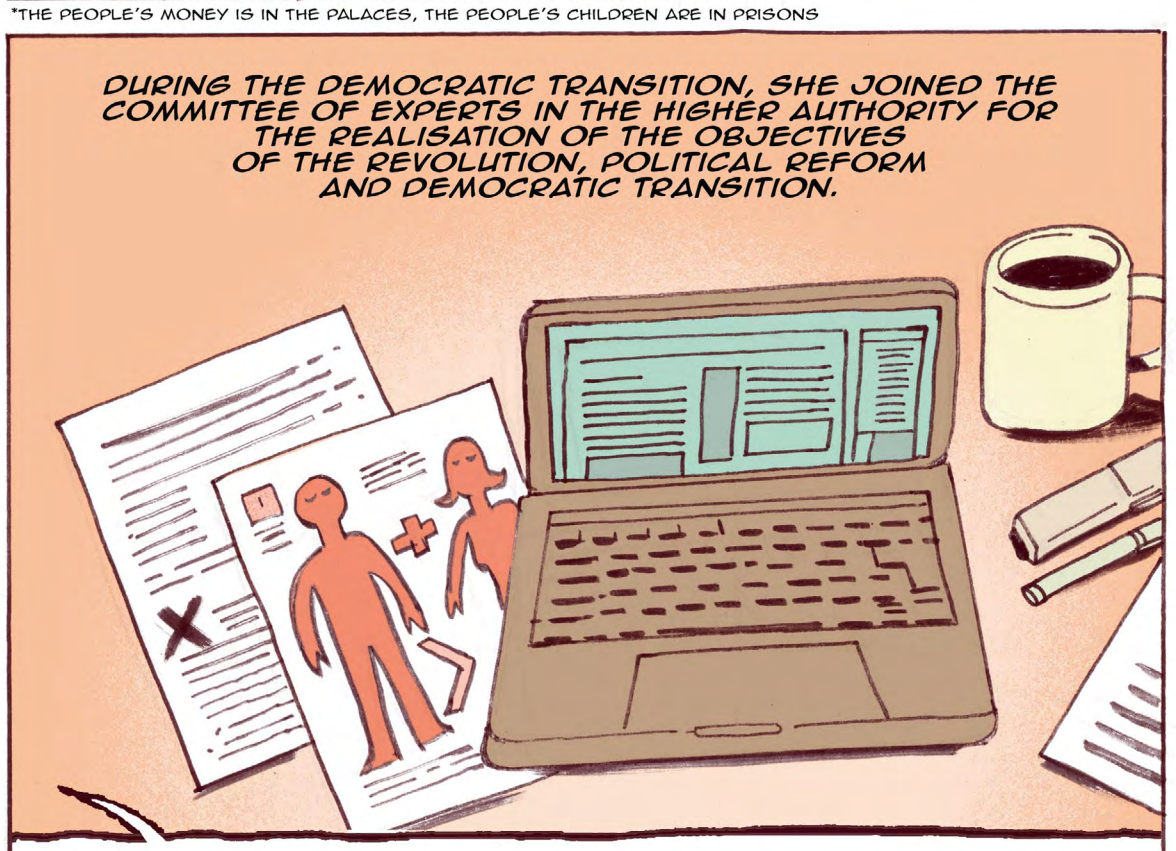
SHE JOINED THE DEMONSTRATIONS IN TUNIS IN DECEMBER 2010 AND JANUARY 2011, DESPITE THE OFTEN FORCEFUL ATTEMPTS BY THE POLICE TO DISPERSE THE DEMONSTRATORS.

PRESIDENT BEN ALI FLED AFTER A FINAL DAY OF RIOTS ON 14 JANUARY 2011, LEAVING BEHIND A PEOPLE IN REVOLT AFTER 23 YEARS OF UNDIVIDED POWER.



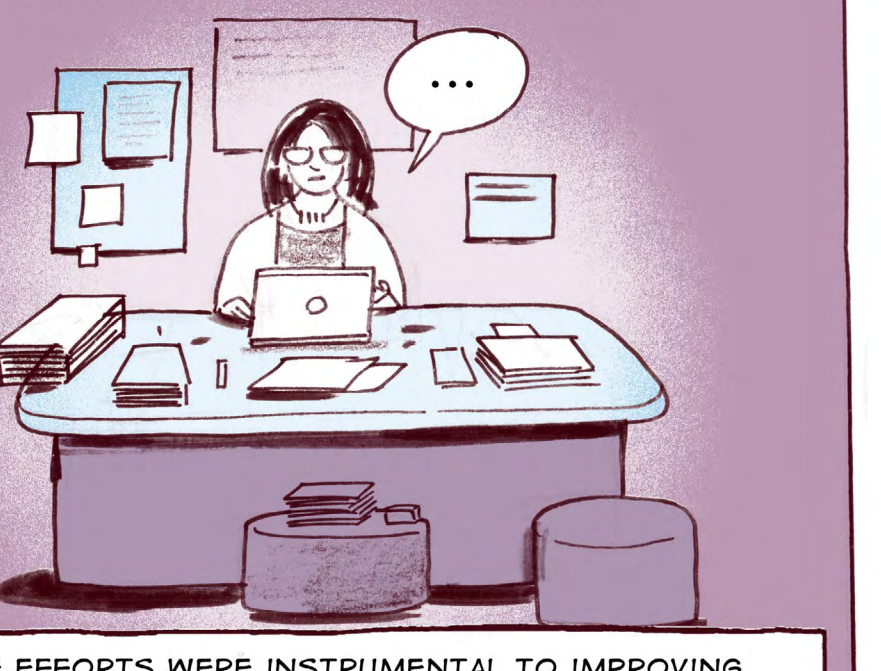
*THE PEOPLE'S MONEY IS IN THE PALACES, THE PEOPLE'S CHILDREN ARE IN PRISONS

DURING THE DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION, SHE JOINED THE COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS IN THE HIGHER AUTHORITY FOR THE REALISATION OF THE OBJECTIVES OF THE REVOLUTION, POLITICAL REFORM AND DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION.



IN 2012 A DRAFT BILL OF THE NEW CONSTITUTION STATED THAT A WOMAN IS "COMPLEMENTARY" TO A MAN BUT NOT EQUAL TO HIM BEFORE THE LAW. UNDER TIME PRESSURE, WE HAD TO COLLABORATE WITH DIFFERENT CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS TO PREVENT THIS UNACCEPTABLE BILL FROM PASSING.

WITHIN THE COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS, SHE CONTRIBUTED TO THE ANALYSIS OF LEGAL TEXTS AND HELPED DEVELOP NEW TEXTS AIMED AT PROTECTING RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS IN ACCORDANCE WITH INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS.



THESE EFFORTS WERE INSTRUMENTAL TO IMPROVING LEGISLATION CONCERNING THE FREEDOMS OF ASSOCIATION, ASSEMBLY, PRESS AND EXPRESSION AND TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF PARITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN IN THE ELECTORAL LISTS.

AT SEVEN IN THE MORNING ON 25 JULY 2017, I GOT ACCESS TO THE DRAFT OF AN IMPORTANT BILL THAT WAS GOING TO BE VOTED ON IN THE PARLIAMENT THE FOLLOWING DAY. WE WERE NOTIFIED OF POTENTIAL INCONSISTENCIES IN THIS BILL THAT WOULD LEAD TO THE LOWERING OF THE LEGAL AGE OF SEXUAL CONSENT FROM 16 TO 13.



UPON READING THE DRAFT, I POINTED OUT THE INCONSISTENCIES AND IMMEDIATELY NOTIFIED THE MEMBERS OF ATFD, WHO, WITHIN HOURS, ORGANISED A CAMPAIGN TO ALERT THE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT. THE CAMPAIGN WAS SUCCESSFUL IN REMOVING THE PROBLEMATIC PROVISIONS BEFORE THE BILL WAS PASSED ON 26 JULY.

ANOTHER ACHIEVEMENT OF YOSRA WAS TO FOLLOW UP ON THE WORK OF THE PRESIDENTIAL COMMITTEE FOR FREEDOMS AND EQUALITY (COLIBE), DESPITE THE WAVE OF ATTACKS AND THREATS EXPERIENCED BY THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE AFTER THEIR REPORT WAS PUBLISHED."



*ENCOURAGING HOMOSEXUALITY IS AN UNHOLY ALLIANCE



YOSRA LED THE ORGANISATION OF THE TUNIS CONGRESS FOR INDIVIDUAL FREEDOMS AND EQUALITY, WHERE THE COLIBE REPORT WAS FULLY ENDORSED BY THE 500 ATTENDEES REPRESENTING CIVIL SOCIETY, ARTISTS, ACADEMICS, AND DECISION MAKERS. THIS CONGRESS ALSO PRODUCED A CHARTER FOR INDIVIDUAL LIBERTIES AND EQUALITY IN TUNISIA; A PROJECT THAT REMAINS IN THE DRAWERS OF THE FROZEN PARLIAMENT FOR THE TIME BEING.

YOSRA HELPED SET UP THE FIRST SMALL THEATRE (THÉÂTRE DE POCHE) IN KEF, IN THE NORTH-WEST OF TUNISIA.

WE PARTICIPATED IN A MEETING IN SUPPORT OF ORGANISATIONS PROMOTING THE DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION IN KEF. IN THIS MEETING, WE WERE INVITED BY A GROUP OF YOUNG PEOPLE TO VISIT THE FORMER OFFICE OF BEN ALI'S PARTY THAT THEY HAD TURNED INTO A POCKET-SIZED THEATRE.

THIS THROBBING AND PROMISING LITTLE PLAYHOUSE IN THE HEART OF THE OLD TOWN OF KEF WAS MEANT TO BE AN OPEN WINDOW TO A LARGER WORLD AND TO PROTECT THE YOUTH AGAINST DJIHADIST IN-DOCTRINATION.

ART IS A POWERFUL LEVER AGAINST MISINFORMATION AND DECEIT, AND IS A WAY TO RAISE SELF-AWARENESS. THE YOUNG PEOPLE IN KEF INSPIRED ME TO SET UP OTHER PROJECTS AROUND ART, SUCH AS THE MASAR AND FANNY RAGHMAN ANNI ART SPACE IN BAB ASSAL IN TUNIS.

... AND HELPED SET UP A WOMEN'S SUPPORT ASSOCIATION IN REMADA, IN THE FAR SOUTH OF TUNISIA.

IN 2013, YOSRA BECAME THE FIRST TUNISIAN WOMAN IN CHARGE OF THE MAGHREB AND MIDDLE EAST OFFICE OF THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS.

UPON JOINING, SHE LAUNCHED HER FIRST MAJOR ADVOCACY ACTION IN SUPPORT OF THE CARTOONIST JABEUR MEJRI, WHO WAS PROSECUTED AND SENTENCED FOR DEPICTING THE PROPHET MOHAMED IN A CARTOON. SHE DIDN'T GIVE UP UNTIL HE WAS GRANTED ASYLUM AND LEFT TO PURSUE HIS LIFE OUTSIDE OF TUNISIA.

AS PART OF THIS NEW ROLE, SHE NOTABLY TRAVELLED TO DJERBA, IN THE SOUTH OF TUNISIA, TO SUPPORT THE HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST LINA BEN MHENI IN HER LEGAL CASE AGAINST POLICE HARASSMENT.

IT'S IMPORTANT TO SUPPORT LINA, BECAUSE SHE HAS NEVER STOPPED FIGHTING AND STANDING UP FOR EVERYONE ELSE.

UNFORTUNATELY, LINA LEFT FOR ANOTHER WORLD BEFORE WINNING HER CASE.

HOWEVER, YOSRA WAS DETERMINED TO HONOUR LINA'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE FIGHT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, AND JUST A FEW WEEKS BEFORE SHE DIED, LINA WAS RECEIVED IN AN UNFORGETTABLE CEREMONY HOSTED BY ATFD.

WELCOME TO YOUR HOME! I'M GLAD YOU'RE WITH US.

COMMITTED TO THE INDIVISIBILITY OF THE FOUNDATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS, YOSRA INSISTS THAT ALL RIGHTS, INCLUDING SEXUAL RIGHTS, HAVE EQUAL PRIORITY. HENCE, SHE WAS AMONG THE FIRST ACTIVISTS IN TUNISIA, THE MAGHREB AND THE MIDDLE EAST TO ADVOCATE FOR THE CONVERGENCE OF STRUGGLES.

FIRST, WE SHOW SOLIDARITY, BECAUSE WE SHARE THE SAME UNIVERSAL FRAMEWORK OF HUMAN RIGHTS. THEN, WE PROMOTE A JOINT DEMAND TO "GET RID OF ALL INEQUALITIES AND LEGAL INJUSTICES" – AND THESE JOINT EFFORTS WILL EVENTUALLY EMPOWER OUR MOVEMENT.

ON 30 NOVEMBER 2019, ATFD CALLED FOR A NATIONAL PROTEST TO COMBAT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, ECHOING THE INTERNATIONAL ME TOO (#METOO) MOVEMENT DENOUNCING SEXUAL ABUSE. SEVERAL LGBTQ++ ORGANISATIONS ALSO JOINED.

القانون جاء والعنف ماوفي

STOP VIOLENCE

AS ONE OF THE FOUNDING MEMBERS OF THE CIVIL COLLECTIVE FOR INDIVIDUAL LIBERTIES (CCLI), YOSRA SUCCESSFULLY MANAGED TO INVOLVE THE VERY FIRST TUNISIAN LGBTQI++ RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS.

... YOUNG PEOPLE SOMETIMES CRITICISE THE HISTORICAL FEMINIST MOVEMENT. THAT IS GOOD, BECAUSE EACH TIME A MOVEMENT IS QUESTIONED, IT LEADS TO THE EMERGENCE OF INTERESTING IDEAS AND RESULTS.

YOSRA SUPPORTED A NUMBER OF LGBTQI++ PERSONS IN THE MENA REGION, SINCE 2011, TO OBTAIN THE RIGHT TO ASYLUM IN COUNTRIES WHERE THEIR SEXUAL RIGHTS ARE RESPECTED AND WHERE THEY WOULD BE PROTECTED FROM PERSECUTION.

THERE ARE STILL MANY HUMAN RIGHTS CHALLENGES IN TUNISIA, INCLUDING ABSOLUTE EQUALITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN, EQUALITY OF INHERITANCE, REFORM OF THE CODE OF PERSONAL STATUS, PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, INDIVIDUAL AND SEXUAL FREEDOMS, ETC.

* LAW IS ENACTED AND VIOLENCE NEVER ENDS.

THE FUTURE OF THESE ISSUES IS UNCERTAIN, ESPECIALLY IN THE CURRENT POLITICAL CLIMATE OF TUNISIA. YET, YOSRA HAS PLEDGED TO CLOSELY MONITOR THE POSSIBLE DRIFTS THAT MAY OCCUR IN THE POLITICAL SYSTEM, WHICH COULD AFFECT THE PURSUIT OF THESE GOALS.

THERE IS NO GUARANTEE THAT THIS MAJOR TURNING POINT IN TUNISIAN POLITICAL LIFE, WITH ALL THE EXCEPTIONAL MEASURES, DOES NOT LEAD TO A NEW DICTATORSHIP.

LIKE YOSRA FRAWES, MANY OTHER BRAVE WOMEN ARE FIGHTING ON MULTIPLE FRONTS TO MAKE THIS WORLD A BETTER AND MORE EQUAL PLACE. FOR MORE THAN TEN YEARS, THE ANNE KLEIN PRIZE HAS BEEN AWARDED TO INSPIRING WOMEN WHO DEFEND CIVIL LIBERTIES, EQUALITY, AND THE RIGHT TO DIGNITY ALL OVER THE WORLD.

BY AWARDING YOSRA FRAWES THE ANNE KLEIN WOMEN'S PRIZE, THE HEINRICH-BÖLL-FOUNDATION WANTS TO ENCOURAGE AND HONOUR THE FEMINIST MOVEMENTS IN TUNISIA. THE WOMEN OF THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA REGION HAVE FOR DECADES BEEN FIGHTING FOR THEIR RIGHTS, AGAINST EXCLUSION AND FOR EQUALITY AT ALL POLITICAL AND SOCIAL LEVELS.

I AM HONOURED TO RECEIVE THIS AWARD AND TO FOLLOW THE PATH OF ALL THE BRAVE WOMEN WHO HAVE RECEIVED THIS AWARD BEFORE ME. I DEDICATE THIS TO ALL TUNISIAN WOMEN. THE FIGHT CONTINUES.

HEINRICH BÖLL

CONGRATULATIONS YOSRA! AND THANK YOU FOR LEADING THE FIGHT FOR FULL EQUALITY.

THANK YOU! I WILL PASS ON YOUR CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL WOMEN IN TUNISIA.

*BARBARA UNMÜßIG, PRESIDENT OF THE JURY AND OF THE HEINRICH BÖLL FOUNDATION, BERLIN.

Die Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung ist eine Agentur für grüne Ideen und Projekte, eine reformpolitische Zukunftswerkstatt und ein internationales Netzwerk mit weit über 100 Partnerprojekten in rund 60 Ländern. Demokratie und Menschenrechte durchsetzen, gegen die Zerstörung unseres globalen Ökosystems angehen, patriarchale Herrschaftsstrukturen überwinden, in Krisenzonen präventiv den Frieden sichern, die Freiheit des Individuums gegen staatliche und wirtschaftliche Übermacht verteidigen – das sind die Ziele, die Denken und Handeln der Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung bestimmen. Sie ist damit Teil der «grünen» politischen Grundströmung, die sich weit über die Bundesrepublik hinaus in Auseinandersetzung mit den traditionellen politischen Richtungen des Sozialismus, des Liberalismus und des Konservatismus herausgebildet hat.
Organisatorisch ist die Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung unabhängig und steht für geistige Offenheit.
Mit derzeit 34 Auslandsbüros ist sie weltweit gut vernetzt. Sie kooperiert mit ihren Landesstiftungen in den Bundesländern und fördert begabte, gesellschaftspolitisch engagierte Studierende und Graduierte im In- und Ausland. Heinrich Bölls Ermunterung zur zivilgesellschaftlichen Einmischung in die Politik folgt sie gern und möchte andere anstiften mitzutun.

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