

PRESS RELEASE

Incomplete Decentralization: Solid Waste Management, Local Politics, and Environmental Activism in Tunisia

Tunis, 29 April 2021 – The Arab Reform Initiative and the Heinrich Böll Foundation, Tunis office, today released a new report titled *Environmentalism After Decentralization: The Local Politics of Solid Waste Management in Tunisia*. Based on three cases studies, the report sheds light on the gaps in urban solid waste management which, in the most serious cases, can endanger public health.

The study assesses solid waste collection policies in Nabeul (the good governance case), Maamoura (the feel-good case), and Agareb (the toxic case). These localities were selected after a preliminary examination of their engagement in environmental activism. Using interviews with public officials in these municipalities and local civil society activists, the study identifies positive and negative variables that influence solid waste management at the municipal level.

“Although the *Code des Collectivités Locales* grants numerous powers to municipalities in terms of waste management, this hasn’t translated into noteworthy improvements in solid waste collection and management,” underlines Lana Salman, author of the report and researcher in urban governance and international development. “Municipalities are still unable to manage solid waste in order to ensure the protection of residents’ health.”

According to the study, this mismanagement is due to four main reasons: a very narrow definition of “the environment” at the level of local administration; a lack of coordination between civil society and municipalities; the inability of the local authorities to use their jurisdictional powers to force polluting businesses with a local infrastructure to respect the laws in place; and deconcentrated or centralized institutions such as governors and the National Agency for Waste Management often overriding local authorities.

With an understanding of solid waste management based on the notion of environmental justice, the study shows that, behind the national corruption scandals, it is people’s health that is on the front lines of waste mismanagement.

The study calls for the municipalities to adopt a broader definition of the environment: not as an external variable to be loosely taken into account but rather as a critical question for daily life and public health. It also calls on municipalities to enact Article 141 of the *Codes des Collectivités Locales*, which empowers them to impose taxes and fees on polluting activities.

"This report draws direct links between local governance, the politico-economic dimensions of the industrial activities of modernization, and their impact on the lives of the most vulnerable in post-revolution Tunisia. In the absence of an environmentally just and responsible management, the most vulnerable communities will continue to pay the highest price," says Zied Boussem of the Arab Reform Initiative.

"A successful decentralization in Tunisia remains conditional on several environmental challenges, including the issue of solid waste management, which embodies poor local governance and ineffective local environmental policies. In addition to the different understandings of the environment by the local actors interviewed, the report demonstrates how the failure of effective public practices and

policies can lead to consequences that go beyond environmental degradation. Indeed, we are talking about slow violence," explains Olfa Chebaane of the Heinrich Böll Foundation.

Background notes and media contacts:

*The **Arab Reform Initiative** is an independent Arab think tank working with expert partners in the Middle East and North Africa and beyond to articulate a home-grown agenda for democratic change and social justice. It conducts research and policy analysis and provides a platform for inspirational voices based on the principles of diversity, impartiality, and gender equality.*

*The **Heinrich Böll Foundation** is a catalyst for green visions and projects. We are affiliated with the German Green Party. We work with partners in over 60 countries and currently maintain 34 international offices, including the one in Tunis. We defend human rights and work for a healthy and sustainable environment for present and future generations.*

For media inquiries, please contact Malek Lakhel - m.lakhel@arab-reform.net Mobile: +216 29143273