

The Arab Regional Office: 2014-2017 Strategy

I. Summary

The euphoria that accompanied the Arab uprisings has now subsided and the biggest challenge the region faces is the possibility of a transition to chaos or renewed authoritarianism. At the time, OSF responded quickly and discreetly to the revolutions in a bold move to empower civil society to play a lead role in preserving the revolutionary momentum and prospects for democratic transition through the Arab Transitions Fund (ATF). We go into the new strategy period with a balanced understanding that the Arab uprisings have created unprecedented opportunities as well as conflict and danger.

Our strongest partners are influential groups with reach and reputation: groups such as Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights and the Arab Digital Expression Foundation in Cairo; the Center for Arab Women Training and Research in Tunis; and the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture in Beirut. Through the ATF we have supported them and hundreds of emerging actors. Our efforts were not enough to halt the prevailing instability and insecurity across the region; it did succeed, however, in pushing back against regression and abuses and important work is still to come.

Three strategic shifts in the regional landscape create opportunities for advances across ARO's four fields of engagement of Rights, Women, Media, and the Arts.

We propose four distinct concepts which capitalize on the current milieu. First, we propose to transform the relationship of citizens to the policy process in Egypt and Tunisia where the most important policy opportunities lie ahead. We will build an independent policy community capable of producing good inputs, solid advocacy campaigning, and working with policymakers. Second, we plan to respond to the chaos and violent conflicts that some of the revolutions have produced. Based on the insight that humanitarian and rights interventions in conflicts and disasters have been inflection points for civil society in many of our efforts, we plan interventions in Syria and Palestine and will create a regional humanitarian network focused on the nexus of conflict and rights. Third, we plan experimental activism hubs for youth to maintain their presence in the public sphere at a time when their voices are most needed. Finally, we place a bet that, working with our allies, we can reclaim the regional body, the League of Arab States, as a valuable platform for advocacy.

Overall, our goal is to promote the nascent culture of accountability and strengthen efforts to secure deeper and enduring transitions to free and just societies in the Arab region. We seek to achieve this by supporting civil society actors engaged in reforming key institutions, expanding fundamental rights and freedoms, and enlisting the broadest possible participation in such efforts.

II. History and Context

ARO Capacities. The Arab uprisings marked a watershed for the work of ARO. Within months, the office substantially increased the size of individual grants and its overall grants volume. It created an alliance of leading local and regional organizations to re-grant funds and provide technical support to emerging groups and initiatives. This "bottom-up" approach enhanced ARO's credibility among local CSOs, expanded the office's networks, and bolstered the widely held view of OSF as a bold, flexible, and nimble donor. ARO's senior staffs are recognized leaders in their respective fields and bring a

diverse skill set that includes advocacy, communication, litigation, and operating in transition and conflict situations.

Geographically, ARO has expanded its regional footprint, recently opening a satellite office in Tunis that will enable deeper, more qualitative engagement with burgeoning partnerships in North Africa. ARO will continue to combine grant making with support for capacity building, technical assistance, and networking to strengthen the effectiveness, impact, and sustainability of partner organizations. Due to political sensitivities and the controversies surrounding the work of foreign donors in the region, ARO has avoided operational activities, instead relying almost exclusively on grant making as its main tool of choice. However, in light of recent political developments and ARO's increased standing in the region, the office believes it is possible to gradually pursue higher profile work through advocacy, financial investments, and concepts over the next four years.

III. Fealty to Fields and Places

Types of Countries

ARO is committed to supporting change in the following country settings:

- **Non-transitional:** Countries that have yet to experience transformative political change but where civil society is using available space to press open society demands: Morocco, Jordan, Lebanon, and possibly Algeria.
- **Revolutionary/Conflict:** Countries in open and pro-longed conflict: Syria, Yemen, and Palestine.
- **Transitional:** Countries where regimes have been toppled but where advancement of open society is subject to new challenges and old threats: Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt.

As a primarily grant making operation, ARO relies on civil society as partners not merely beneficiaries. Each of our four programs pursues several types of partnerships:

- **Regional exemplars:** Key organizations in our four main fields which, above all, espouse open society values, have a strong regional presence, enjoy good institutional capacity, and have regional convening power (e.g., Arab Institute for Human Rights, Centre for Arab Women for Training and Research, Arab Fund for Arts and Culture, and Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies)
- **National exemplars:** Key organizations in each of our four main fields and in each priority country to ensure presence of exemplars in content and practice (e.g., Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights in Egypt, Al-Haq in Palestine)
- **Promising start-ups:** Unique start-ups breaking new ground (e.g., Tn-Reform's work on policing and Association of Citizenship and Development of the North-West, both in Tunisia)
- **International expertise:** International organizations with specific thematic expertise that is necessary to increase the overall effectiveness of civil society in the region. We have pursued this approach previously through, for example, the introduction of budget work and budget transparency by International Budget Partnership, the International Center for Transitional Justice's efforts on transitional justice, and CVT's New Tactics in Human Rights training in effective advocacy strategies.

Thematic Priorities

The ARO thematic priority areas of Rights, Women, Media, and Arts are broad and encompass the main areas of civil society engagement in the region. These areas are also complementary and have helped create communities of practice within the region. This division has allowed us to identify areas where new sub fields can be nurtured and gaps filled. In the coming period, we will pay particular attention to the inclusion of youth across the different programs, mainstreaming women's rights, and to higher education and universities as key spaces for learning, knowledge production, and activism.

A. The Arab Transitions Fund: Supporting Revolutionary Civil Society

OSF responded quickly to the momentous developments in the Arab region, launching in 2011 the Arab Transitions Fund (ATF) to support civil society in countries undergoing change. ATF created a community of re-granters across several thematic areas to expedite support to emerging groups and actors, targeting in particular initiatives involving marginalized communities. The eleven ATF-funded regranters have supported nearly 300 activists, filmmakers, bloggers, and groups with financial, technical and capacity-building assistance. ATF re-granters worked closely with sub-grantees to build their programmatic and organizational capacities through training and other programs designed to enhance the sustainability of promising initiatives in countries undergoing transition. Large general support grants further enabled leading organizations that operate on both national and regional levels, such as the Arab Digital Expression Foundation and Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights in Egypt, to scale up work and enable rapid response capabilities to monitor and inform transitional processes. For the new strategy, we will scale back or tie off certain re-granting activities, while mainstreaming new CSO actors into existing fields.

B. Rights and Governance

For decades human rights organizations endured harassment, cooptation, intimidation, and often worse, at the hands of governments and were left with weak governance and management. The human rights community had no choice but to abandon national level advocacy and focused instead on international advocacy based on their monitoring and documentation of abuses at home. Grassroots mobilization was a red line, few civil society efforts engaged the public in a proactive manner, and the use of litigation and legal advocacy was limited to countries with remnants of judicial independence and activism. The new circumstances in the region see a proliferation of rights groups seeking to expand existing and acquire new capacities to meet the challenges before them and to maximize exploitation of the opportunities now possible.

Human Rights

The complexity of the human rights challenges in the region, the need to protect and expand the openings that exist, and the uneven development of the human rights community require a comprehensive and multi-track approach focused on advancing work on equality and nondiscrimination, social and economic rights, transitional justice, and monitoring and advocacy.

ARO will support a combination of national, regional and international organizations in the following human rights sub-areas:

1. Equality and Non-discrimination. Arab societies are held back by the lack of inclusive national identities, and rampant discrimination that render migrant workers, minorities, refugees, and indigent groups more broadly at risk. ARO will support efforts to challenge inequality and discrimination through:

a. Access to Justice and Legal Advocacy. ARO sustains an informal community of over fifteen grantees across Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, and Tunisia that use litigation to contest gaps in the law and proactively expose and challenge discriminatory practices. The Hisham Mubarak Law Center (HMLC) in Egypt, Legal Agenda in Lebanon, and Tamkeen in Jordan are leading partners who excel at strategic litigation, use of the media, and campaigning. ARO's support for PILnet and Legal Agenda to develop an appropriate regional strategy that enhances regional exchange and learning and facilitate regional campaigns will further enhance engagement in this area. ARO and OSJI together support The Justice Center for Legal Aid in Jordan to promote legal aid reform—a potential pilot for the region.

b. LGBTI Rights. Along with the HRI, ARO will support two complementary regional initiatives by the Foundation for Equality and Mantiqitna. These are the leading actors in the field with the capacity, legitimacy, and knowledge to pursue programs and re-granting to support emergency protection, spaces for dialogue, and capacity building for new activists and groups.

c. Statelessness and Nationality Laws. ARO and OSJI developed a partnership with Tilburg University to review nationality laws and practices in order to identify discriminatory provisions and trends in the Arab region. As the research is finalized in 2013, a regional partnership is planned with Legal Agenda to pursue advocacy opportunities with local partners to raise the regional profile of statelessness as a rights issue.

Together the three areas will serve to further protection of vulnerable communities through their empowerment and pursuit of legal and policy reforms at several levels.

2. Economic and Social Rights. The failures of development paradigms, widespread corruption and lack of accountability have been ruinous for people in the region. ARO supports leading organizations, such as the Tunisian Forum for Social and Economic Rights (FTDES) and the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR) credited with raising the profile of social and economic rights through quality research and their unique links to labor movements. ARO foresees even closer collaboration with trade unions and labor movements in the pursuit of social justice, and strengthening bottom-up campaigns through Legal Empowerment of the Poor programming, in collaboration with OSJI, around access to basic services. Our goal is to foster the formation of a broad alliance of civil society and labor that calls for social and economic rights as well as democratic accountability to secure the provision and protection of basic rights and services.

3. Transitional Justice. Countries the site of revolutions are immersed in debating transitional justice systems and addressing popular demands for justice. ARO relies on the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) to work in close coordination with local civil society actors,

such as the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) and the Tunisian League for Human Rights (TLHR), as well as national governments and authorities to provide expertise and technical assistance in designing and implementing transitional justice models. Our goal is to ensure that post-revolution laws and mechanisms are consistent with international best practices, the result of broad public debate, realistic, and adapted to local contexts.

4. **Monitoring and Advocacy Capacity.** The rapid expansion of the region's human rights community calls for substantial investment in building skills and capacity. In the coming period, ARO will pursue a three-pronged strategy to strengthen monitoring and advocacy efforts through support for: organizations that are field-builders like Adalah, EIPR, A-Haq and others, who are trusted for credible reporting and effective advocacy and serve as exemplars for the region's human rights community; development of regional advocacy and capacity-building platforms such as the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN) and Cairo Institute's Geneva office, which has transformed the engagement of the region's human rights community with the Human Rights Council; and New Tactics in Human Rights which provides civil society with capacity-building and training focused on strategic effectiveness and tactical flexibility and know-how for effective national level advocacy. An ARO concept around think tanks is proposed in this strategy to further enhance the impact of these organizations' advocacy efforts.

Our goal is that human rights are protected and accountability is sought by civil society organizations at the national and regional levels that are increasingly more strategic, more adept at using a range of approaches and, as a result, more successful.

Rule of Law

From constitution making to due process rights and police reform, input from civil society and technical assistance for governments are necessary to secure legal frameworks that safeguard human rights and enshrine the rule of law as practice. ARO supports specialized international organizations such as the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) and ICTJ to directly engage with governments and local civil society and inform debates over needed reforms. On the local level, the TLHR, Lawyers for Justice in Libya and the HMLC and United Group in Egypt are actively engaged in monitoring and informing reform processes through comparative research and awareness raising campaigns. ARO will also continue to explore areas where OSF can directly contribute its specialized expertise in, for example, international justice and complementarity, police reform, and other areas through direct engagement with government and official bodies. ARO in cooperation with OSJI will also support capacity building for legal professionals and students through clinical legal education to introduce them to public interest law and encourage legal education reform. ARO already partners with universities in Egypt, Palestine, and Jordan and will explore the same in Tunisia to promote legal practice that is responsive to community needs. Collaboration with OSFHESP will also be sought to develop engagement on legal education for new generations of practitioners, including through support for academic research.

Transparency and Public Accountability

Corruption, nepotism, and state exploitation of resources are some of the evident consequences of the absence of transparency and public accountability and effective legal mechanisms that protect people's interests. Cultivating a culture of accountability requires both that citizens' demand and exercises their rights to know, to be informed, and to seek redress, and that officials are accountable irrespective of their position. To foster this cultural shift, ARO will pursue two avenues that together build greater transparency and accountability and the active engagement of citizens in achieving and protecting both.

1. Budget Work and Budget Transparency. ARO will continue its collaboration with the International Budget Partnership (IBP) as a key partner we rely on to build the capacity of civil society to utilize this vital tool in a variety of settings where citizen engagement in decision-making processes is both needed and possible. ARO's goal is a civil society that is active and effective in using budget work and actively advocating for budget transparency.

2. Transparency and Accountability of Corporations. ARO will engage with international and local organizations to develop programming in this area, starting with consumer protection to foster public awareness and engagement in efforts to secure corporate responsibility. The Center for Economic and Social Rights in Egypt has a record of legal advocacy targeting corporations involved in corruption and would be a key partner for ARO.

ARO aims to achieve greater accountability of corporations and businesses starting from a consumer protection angle in parallel to fostering debates around corporate practices, public accountability, and countering corruption. Within four years, the ARO will have made a substantial contribution to strengthening civil society's know-how and capacity to inform democratic transitions, by fostering effective civil society interventions to introduce and enforce checks and balances in governing frameworks integral to the consolidation of the rule of law, democratic accountability, and protection of human rights.

Donors

The funding community in this area is dominated by governmental donors, with EU agencies and EU countries at the forefront. The US government, its sub-contractors and implementing agencies are also prominent but controversial. ARO coordinates primarily with like-minded donors with whom we share fundamental values, who are flexible and have a favorable reputation in the region, such as Oxfam Novib, Ford Foundation, and Sigrid Rausing Trust.

Significant Collaborations

The Program will continue to collaborate internally with other ARO portfolios, and with OSJI to draw on specialized expertise and global networks with relation to Legal Empowerment of the Poor programming, statelessness and access to citizenship, international justice, and clinical legal education. Closer coordination with HRI is foreseen in general and concerning LGBTI rights in particular. ARO and OSF-IMI have a strong partnership to further rights of migrant workers as part of the Asia Middle East migration corridor project. And ARO is collaborating with OSF-HESP in supporting the piloting of a unique public health and rights center at An-Najah University in Palestine.

C. Women's Rights and Gender Development

Combating Violence and Discrimination

Violence against women is widespread in the region with the absence of legal protection frameworks. Discrimination against women in various national legislation persists, further impeding efforts to empower women. The goal in this area is to contribute to reducing violence against women through legal reform of personal status laws and penal codes, advocacy for the adoption of laws to protect women, provision of legal and psycho-social services for victims of violence, and awareness raising campaigns.

The Field

ARO's partners include the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling (WCLAC) in Palestine, a leading organization with innovative approaches to legislation, extensive experience in services for victims, and a well-developed advocacy program; Women against Violence (WAV) in Israel, a strong and reputable organization that addresses violence and access to employment and coordinates the main Arab regional network on violence; the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women (ATFD), the leading feminist secular voice in Tunisia that played a key role in the policy arena and investigations during the transition's initial phase. ARO will continue to support these partners while opening the door for new partnerships. ARO's support will include direct grants; support for research, comparative analysis, and studies; national and regional advocacy; and strengthening regional and international networking and coordination.

Promoting Protection in Conflict Countries

The goal in this area is to enhance capacity of CSOs in conflict countries to properly report on effects of war on women and use the information for advocacy purposes. This will include opportunities for strategic litigation at the national and international levels.

ARO formed a consortium of five CSOs in Palestine to carry out the first phase of the project: Al Haq, the oldest Arab human rights organization in the region; Al Mezan Center for Human Rights (Al Mezan), a prominent organization that excels in documenting violations against residents of the Gaza Strip under severe circumstances; Women's Affairs Technical Committee (WATC), a body that represents different political factions, tackles a range of issues related to women, with a strong presence in communities; Culture and Free Thought Association (CFTA), based in the southern Gaza Strip, works with the most 9 vulnerable communities and innovatively combines art and cultural expression with rights work; and WCLAC. ARO will explore new partnerships in other countries of conflict including Iraq, Yemen, Libya, and Syria. The regional work will draw lessons learnt from the Palestinian experience.

Enhancing Participation in Democratic Transitions

The goal in this area is to ensure visible participation of women in all stages of democratic transition, safeguard women's rights in new legislation, and combat new restrictions and violence.

The Field

ARO's partners include Centre for Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR) in Tunisia, an ARO-ATF partner that has carried out substantive work and re-granting over the past two years, is a well-developed and structured organization with long experience in training, research, networking, and policy work. CAWTAR will continue to be funded to support newly emerging groups. ARO will continue to support Nazra for Feminist Studies, an impressive new-generation organization in Egypt that has a courageous approach to women's issues, follows a soft approach in protecting LGBTI rights, and has launched one of the first projects on protection of women human rights defenders in Egypt and the region. With ARO support, Women and Memory Forum, a respected organization that combines academia with activism, will further develop and disseminate its home-grown gender and women studies discourses in the region. ARO will also continue support for Birzeit University Institute of Women's Studies, the first institute of its kind and a model for gender studies programs in the region, to strengthen the women's and gender fields and implement projects on evolving gender dynamics in the Palestinian context.

Donors

The donor landscape for women's rights includes governmental funders such as EU, USAID, Nordic countries' development agencies in addition to private foundations. ARO coordinates with like-minded non-governmental agencies such as Ford Foundation, Oxfam Novib, HIVOS, Sigrid Rausing Trust, and Heinrich Boll Stiftung. Other Significant Collaborations The Program will continue to collaborate internally with other ARO portfolios, and with OSF-IWP on common countries of engagement, OSJI on protection of women in conflict countries, OSF-HRI concerning LGBTI rights and disability rights projects, Scholarship and Fellowship Programs to develop the field of women's studies, and OSF-IMI on migrant and domestic workers. ARO will explore possibilities of collaboration with other programs such as OSF-HESP and the OSF-YI when relevant.

D. Media and Information Program

Quality Media Content Despite obvious gains with the onset of the Arab uprisings, media in the region is still largely controlled by states or government interests, which means political news is often censored or self-censored and programming rarely oriented towards the public interest. Collectively, programming in the field of Quality Media Content will seek to strengthen and consolidate emergent alternative media spaces and platforms to inform publics, provide checks on government, and promote active engagement by citizens. The Field The field includes emergent independent news outlets, journalism training centers, production houses, and CSOs working on broadcast reform.

Through the course of the new strategy, ARO will engage in three sub-areas:

1. Content Providers. OSF will seed or sustain a handful of so-called "anchor" outlets in a number of countries. These are unique outlets in their country settings: they are either lone voices of independence, willing and able to serve as watchdogs to power, and are standard setters for the production of quality news and opinion. ARO will continue to support seven strategic partners, and will develop new partnerships with start-up independent broadcasters in Syria and Libya. Partners include a combination of national exemplars, up-and-coming new

outlets in addition to one regional re-granting organization. We will complement direct financial assistance with organizational capacity building and technical assistance that aims to develop viable business models. The goal is delivery of regular, public interest content to large audiences by wellmanaged news organization that demonstrate improved financial viability.

2. Skills and Production. A second sub-area is composed of leading institutions and organizations that provide high-level skills training and networking or they directly produce high-impact public interest content. Partners include leading investigative journalism networks (Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism), innovative training hubs (Sahafet Welad al-Balad), centers for excellence in journalism (African Center for the Training of Journalists and Communicators), and independent production houses in key transitional countries that deliver knowledge where skills are in high demand or provide new models for delivery of public interest content (Public Service Broadcasting Initiative). Others are new organizations being seeded in postrevolutionary countries such as Syria and Libya. The goal is to strengthen organizational management and performance of leading institutions that will train new cadre of media professionals and increase long form or investigative journalism content in the media in transitional countries.

3. Public Service Broadcasting. A third sub-area is comprised of local and international organizations working to improve the quality and dissemination of mass-audience public service content through technical assistance and reform advocacy around the strategically important state broadcasting sector. Partners include leading CSOs and activist coalitions pushing for reforms such as the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression (AFTE) and Support for Information Technology Center (SITC). In Tunisia, both funds and technical assistance will be provided to the newly launched Tunisia Press Freedom Coalition, a group of CSOs and FoE activists, and Yaqaza, to enable advocacy on state broadcast reform and regulation. ARO will also seek to provide technical support to the High Audio Visual Council in Tunisia (HAICA), which will oversee regulation of the broadcasting sector. Partners also include INGOs with international expertise, semi-official regulatory bodies, and emergent advocacy groups in Libya. The goal is to place the issue of broadcast reform front and center in local debates; impact local policy discussions; adopt best regulatory practices; and encourage new modes of content production in transitional countries.

Freedom of Expression

Key ARO partners that are proposed for continued support include seven leading freedom of expression advocacy groups operating in Egypt, Tunisia, Palestine, and Lebanon, along with academic institutions and research networks working to promote media policy reform. These groups have formed a bulwark against official infringements on freedom of expression and serve as key pressure groups, fighting to preserve newly seized political space, and include a combination of national exemplars and promising young groups: Arabic Network for Human Rights Information and AFTE in Egypt; Tunis Center for Press Freedom, Tunisia Press Freedom Coalition, and Yaqaza in Tunisia; Maharat in Lebanon, MADA in Palestine, and the American University in Cairo, which has developed the region's first Master's Degree program in media policy.

Access to Information

In spite of the Arab uprisings, transparency is the exception rather than the rule, and governments maintain a tight command over the flow of information. Statistics, historical archives, and basic governmental data remain beyond the reach of citizens due to restrictive laws and a culture of secrecy.

Partners in this field identified for support are between eight and ten CSOs and coalitions spanning Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia. They are leading independent groups at the forefront of efforts to adopt FOI laws; to promote citizen demand for information and government disclosure; and to utilize technology to enable transparency and disseminate information. The key partners include AlQuds Center for Political Studies in Jordan, SITC and AFTE in Egypt; Maharat in Lebanon; Al-Bawsala in Tunisia; Bileil Media Production in Egypt; REMDI Freedom of Information Coalition in Morocco; and ADEF in Egypt.

Donors

The donor landscape for media development has widened following the Arab uprisings and includes a variety of governmental and private donors along with various sub-contacting media developments outfits that span the US and Europe. Among the leading donors and media implementers with which ARO collaborates most closely are International Media Support, SIDA, Oxfam-Novib, and Ford Foundation. It also coordinates joint project work with governmental donors such as USAID, MEPI, and the European Union, which support a number of key partners.

Other Significant Collaborations

ARO collaborates principally with OSF-MP and OSF-IP with whom it shares a number of joint grantees and works in concert in developing fields of operation. In the area of Access to Information, cooperation exists with HRI, and OSJI. The latter is also a collaborator for select work on Freedom of Expression.

E. Arts and Culture

Despite its promise, the field remains nascent and limited to a few strong institutions; major aims include building their organizational capacity and sustainability even as they attend to critical tasks before them.

Independent Artistic Production A key need in the Arab region in recent years has been mobilizing resources to support artistic expression that is not tied to the state, commercial agendas, or traditional genres. Nongovernmental funds run by Arab cultural organizations exist and are pursuing different strategies for raising funds— some are entirely dependent on foreign donors and re-grant their funds; others are doing pioneering work mobilizing Arab donors within the regional context, others do so on a national basis.

The Field

In the coming strategy period ARO will continue to focus primarily on the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC) and a new independent arts and culture grant-making organization focusing on Egypt, with Egyptian donors established by Al Mawred Al Thaqafy (Al Mawred). Among other challenges, Al Mawred will also undergo a transition from their charismatic founding director

who departs in 2014. AFAC which is creating a regional standard for the field also plans to move from 25% Arab funding to 50% through aggressive outreach, public education and fundraising. ARO's goal is to strengthen this emerging field by addressing ongoing development needs such as leadership, governance, and sustainability of the arts-philanthropy sector in the Arab region.

Access to Arts

Spaces All of our partners are engaged to some extent with the issues of connecting artists to audiences. Arts and culture venues are emerging as places of excellence, experimentation, community building, civic gathering, free expression, and debate.

The Field

This work is carried out by three trusted partners, Al Mawred, ArteEast, and Young Arab Theater Fund. Beneficiaries include young people, students, marginalized groups including those living in poor neighborhoods, activists and media professionals who increasingly congregate and organize at independent cultural venues. These platforms and spaces may also help advance other ARO related work in the region. Issues for action include dissemination practices, mobility of artists, exchanges, fostering conversation and debate, work in community centers, universities, and alternative arts spaces. The goal here is to ensure that there is a healthy ecology of diverse and independent cultural spaces servicing a range of audiences in both transitional and more static countries.

Cultural Policy

Cultural policy and reform present both a substantial opportunity and one that has been little explored by our partners until quite recently. In some settings where there have been dramatic openings as in Egypt and Tunisia, there are also significant conservative forces asserting themselves; however arts activists and operators have come together to form a nascent network of cultural policy groups in a number of Arab countries.

The Field

Work on cultural policies and reform does not necessarily require a lot of resources but rather depends on skills, data gathering and advocacy. Nevertheless, the prospects of leveraging additional support if need exists with European donors both government and private who are already beginning to get active. Currently the main actor is Al Mawred working with Ittijahat, the Egyptian Cultural Policy Group and the Arab Cultural Policy Group (both of these latter groups are still somewhat informal bodies). We will return to an earlier discussion with AFAC about placement of policy advisors at culture ministries. ARO goals in the course of the strategy include professionalizing the sector and improving its capacity. At the end of the four-year period would like to see the network of policy groups as influential resources making an impact on reform of ministries, adoption of legislative provisions and channeling of funds on merit basis to civil society cultural operators. Work on reform can be challenging for foreign donors given the reoccurring issues around foreign aid in the region.

Donors

The largest donors to independent arts and culture field are the Ford Foundation and OSF. OSF remains the most flexible and responsive funder, willing to take risks and enjoys a trusted reputation for institution-building in the field of having led the establishment of AFAC which is widely perceived as a success. A group of donors convenes annually that includes European Cultural Foundation, Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, DOEN (Netherlands), Mimeta (Norway), and others. In part, the creation of AFAC to tap into and grow the amount of Arab funding is an effort to address this situation.

Other Significant Collaborations

As OSF has closed its Arts and Culture program the possibilities for cooperation at OSF remain occasional ones with thematic programs such as the Documentary Photography Program or Open Society Fellowships, or potentially with geographies with an interest in the work we support.

IV. Concepts and initiatives

The first concept on protection in times of conflict builds on a related project launched in Palestine in 2012. The concept focusing on policymaking will draw on existing partnerships across thematic priority areas as well as ARO's observations of strengths and weaknesses of think tanks in the region. The third focuses on youth activism and political participation and will bring together a number of leading ATF grantees to collaborate on this idea. Lastly, after two years of groundwork the concept on the League of Arab States positions ARO well to affect reforms at this institution during a time political opportunity.

A. Transition in Policymaking Project (TiPP)

The proposed concept seeks to transform this reality through fostering the emergence of a different civil society policy advocacy community that is capable of astute navigation of the policymaking terrain and the capacity to (1) produce good policy inputs, (2) coordinate public advocacy campaigns in support of good policies, and (3) assist policymakers to implement them. Besides ensuring that public policy serves the public's needs and interests, this will break the status quo where political party outfits and other elite structures dominate policy work without research, public debate or much regard for public opinion.

In order to leverage knowledge from the OSF complex, the Think Tank Fund will be instrumental in informing the conceptualization and planning process. The Scholarship and Fellowship programs will also enhance academic know-how and skillsets. Key strategic partners in the design and implementation would include the Issam Fares Institute at the American University of Beirut, The Arab Studies Institute in Washington D.C., The Arab Reform Initiative with its network of 11 think tanks, the Center of Arab Woman for Training and Research, and the Support for Information Technology Center amongst others. Universities and academic research centers will play an important part in pilot development. In addition to the breadth and depth of OSF's knowledge and network, ARO enjoys credibility among critical civil society stakeholders and existing partnerships with leading CSOs working on policy advocacy. This gives OSF the necessary analytical and convening power for this initiative.

ARO's main adversaries in the project are transitional governments that are pursuing ideologically driven mandates with a top-down approach to policy. Illiberal forces such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or Al-Nahda in Tunisia are developing new political machineries such as party-affiliated think tanks that can advance policy agendas at the expense of broader, more inclusive, policies visions.

ARO defines success of the concept after four years as follows: (1) theories and assumptions about policy making are formulated, tested and have positive impact on policy debates and public opinion; (2) a core group of policy experts is able to effectively develop and advocate for policy positions in key sectors; and (3) the replication of such models and practices by additional groups and ineffective civil society practices are increasingly abandoned.

We would seek co-funding and technical assistance from partners and donors who share a similar vision and commitment to policy work. These would include Ford Foundation, Oxfam Novib, and Sida, and International Media Support, each of which are engaged in work in transitional countries.

B. Dilemmas of Conflict: Protecting Women, Minorities, Refugees and IDPs (PWRI)

Syria

Ensure humanitarian assistance and other services are delivered to IDPs and refugees, through strengthening the capacity of Arab and Syrian organizations, empowering refugees and IDPs to play a role in the process.

Outcomes:

1. Quality and quantity of humanitarian assistance is improved with refugees and IDPs placed at the center of the process and empowered to participate in governing their camps and deciding their daily affairs in urban centers
2. Syrian refugees access needed services and human rights protection
3. Syrian civil society organizations emerge from the conflict as strong actors through partnerships with regional CSOs, networks, joint targeted training, re-granting and incubation of new initiatives.

Palestine

Address the effects of prolonged Israeli occupation in Palestine through monitoring, documenting and reporting on human rights violations, building the capacity of civil society to deal with internal Palestinian divisions and its consequences.

Outcomes:

1. Human rights reporting used more effectively for advocacy and policy making
2. Palestinian and regional CSOs are better equipped to undertake advocacy to promote Palestinian rights regionally and internationally

3. Palestinian CSOs and citizens utilize international human rights instruments and international courts to pursue justice for relevant legal cases.

Regional

Promote the right of civilians to protection during conflict situations focusing on vulnerable groups through development of legal frameworks, conducting awareness raising campaigns, monitoring, documentation and reporting on violations and intensifying advocacy efforts.

Outcomes:

1. Members of vulnerable communities are aware, able and have access to seek remedies to address violations through national channels supported by specialized CSOs
2. Legal frameworks protecting women, minorities, and other marginalized groups are drafted and debated in at least two countries
3. At least two legal cases in conflict countries are identified and presented for strategic litigation and pursued through international courts
4. Creation of an Arab humanitarian network.

ARO will strengthen Arab actors across the region to address consequences of armed conflict and the violence which has emerged in the revolutions. It will support creation of a new regional humanitarian network, a “community of practice” through grantmaking, research and analysis, fellowships and scholarships; ARO’s partners will undertake research, training, advocacy, litigation and advice to governments and intergovernmental organizations (LAS, UN and EU). ARO will support creation of a regional advisory body to oversee the work and provide strategic direction. ARO will continue its work with leading Palestinian groups and develop new partnerships in other countries. On Syria, ARO will continue work with Salma and Aisha networks (on refugee women), cooperate with international and regional humanitarian organizations such as the Welfare Association, Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development, Centre for Victims of Torture, while building the capacity of newly emerging Syrian organizations.

C. Civil Society Engagement with League of Arab State (CSELAS)

The League of Arab States (LAS) has long been regarded as one of the most dysfunctional and ineffective regional organizations in the world. Renowned for disunity among its ranks, it has consistently failed to meet the challenges of a region embroiled in conflict and strife. Because of this dubious reputation, the LAS has been shunned by civil society groups which view constructive engagement as futile. But the Arab uprisings, shifts in LAS leadership, and expressions of willingness to reform have provided a moment of opportunity to transform the LAS into a regional body that is responsive to civil society and that contributes to protecting human rights.

At the conclusion of four years, ARO expects to achieve the following: (1) the creation of an active coalition of CSOs, with a well-conceived strategic plan for engaging the LAS; (2) the adoption of reforms that will strengthen engagement of Arab CSOs; (3) progress in harmonizing LAS frameworks with international human rights standards and implementation of regional

human rights mechanisms, for complaints and effective justice; and (4) recruitment of additional donors to support the initiative.

The concept envisions close collaboration and coordination with trusted regional partners and a number of entities across the OSF complex. Regional partners are respected CSOs with a long history of engagement in human rights and/or observer status with the LAS. They include Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, the Arab Organization for Human Rights, and the Arab Institute for Human Rights. AfriMap is seen as a valuable collaborator that can provide comparative experience with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR). The OSJI is another potential collaborator, particularly on the issue of strengthening the Arab Court for Human Rights.

D. Youth Activism Hubs

ARO's comparative advantage to execute this concept is its existing partners who can provide capacity building, technical assistance, spaces, and other services and opportunities for youth. The partnerships that will be leveraged include the Arab Digital Expression Foundation and its expertise with new media and ICT tools; Ahel and its experience with campaigning and community organizing; New Tactics in Human Rights and its tactical know-how and mapping methodology; the International Budget Partnership budget work and advocacy expertise; Development Support Center's youth activism funding and mentorship skills, and others.

This concept will also provide ARO with a point of convergence for different OSF programs to work together and contribute to its development. The ESP expertise with critical thinking; the YI debate programming and lessons learned from the Youth Action Fund experiences; as well as the potential for collaboration with the East East program to draw out experiences from across the network. Additional regional partners with an interest and relevant expertise may also be enlisted at different stages to design a flexible and sustainable model that can be decentralized and expanded across the region. Those may include government programs and officials that work in the youth sector.

At the conclusion of four years, youth activism will be sustained and made more effective with the access to strategies and spaces that encourage the widest possible participation and dissemination of important information, ideas, critiques, analyses and art/cultural works. As a result, OSF will have helped the emergence of an informed generation of youth to grow into more active social partners and actors of change. This is particularly true today, as political parties are forming and political life is being shaped on university campuses, on the streets, on the Internet, and elsewhere with youth at its heart. The opponents of this initiative are those who seek to constrain the space and topics for intellectual and cultural dialogue. These will include political and religious actors attempting to co-opt youth activism and movements – particularly the most marginalized youth. The main risk we see is in framing the initiative broadly. This may make it difficult to assess whether the sector's capacity is significantly increased or whether we "only" supported individual and sporadic initiatives. Another risk would be for partners to lose interest halfway through the project and opt out. The opposite, however, should be considered as a measure of success.

V. Contribution to Food Security Shared Frameworks

ARO proposes to contribute to OSF's shared framework on food security in Africa by, among other things, ensuring that post revolution debates over economic development in Tunisia and Egypt do not focus on replicating policies that failed to achieve food security and neglected smallholder farmers' interests and rights. ARO is proposing a comprehensive strategy in order to ensure policy alternatives are identified and backed up by necessary evidence, including actual piloting of food systems, and with direct involvement of farmers in shaping the public debate and policy discussions.

ARO's proposed engagement in the field of food security builds on our existing work on access to justice and legal empowerment of the poor as well as public transparency and accountability. To advance this shared framework, ARO will build on existing work with the Sons of Land Association for Human Rights, Centre for Egyptian Women Legal Assistance, the American University of Cairo in Egypt and the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights in Tunisia. ARO will collaborate with the Africa Office, Justice Initiative and Transparency Program.

ARO will define progress towards achieving our goals as follows: (1) emergence of effective and knowledgeable leadership among small holding farmers; (2) ability of farmers and CSOs to challenge and reform 2-3 specific policies dealing with right to natural resources and sustainable models of agricultural development; and (3) establishment of a regional institute specialized in food security in North Africa that is funded by other interested donors.

Of the key obstacles of engaging in this field is the weak capacity of local partners hence greater investment from ARO's side to develop this concept and civil society's role in the region will be needed. Among our opponents are people and corporations with investment interests which contribute to aggravating food security in Egypt and Tunisia.

VI. Organizational Plans

Until April 2013, ARO operated for over a year without a permanent director. With limited time for strategy development, a more thorough review of the structure and division of labor is to be undertaken by the end of 2013.

The ARO has one of the highest volumes of grants in all of OSF and an overall team of ten staff. ARO will continue to boost its institutional capacity by filling existing vacancies, developing a more fluid team structure, and enhancing internal collaboration. This will allow for more emphasis on monitoring and learning, more experimental projects, and pursuit of new ideas/approaches.

Staff

The ARO currently has eight staff based in Amman, one in New York, and one in Tunisia. As of this writing, six additional positions are being filled across the three offices. In terms of responsibilities, we foresee an adjustment involving the hiring of two additional program coordinator level staff. For two specific items in the proposed strategy (League of Arab States and contribution to Food Security shared framework), ARO anticipates the need to retain two consultants/experts over two years. The general structure of programs will be reorganized into three teams headed by SPOs. Each of the three teams will be responsible for:

1. Overseeing the programming/grant making in an assigned field/place;
2. Overseeing the implementation of an ARO concept; and
3. Monitoring developments in 2-3 assigned countries (to be rotated quarterly between teams).