

The Revolution is **NOT** Over.

By Dr. Raghda El-Ebrashi, 28



The January 25th revolution in Egypt was just a start to our call for democracy. Egypt is not democratic yet, although many people are celebrating the 'victory' of the revolution. There

are many challenges that we need to shed the light on which are hindering the path to democracy in my country. Young people like me are still living with hope as we had been for more than 25 years, but still, hope alone is not enough.

The most basic thing to do first is to define the meaning of democracy, freedom, and the civil state. We still don't have a national or state agreement on the meaning of those critical elements, which means every person or group in Egypt can exercise citizenship from a subjective point of view. People who are calling for a civil state like me are in a real struggle—not only in debates—with those who believe in a religious state, or even with those who misinterpret secularism. Everyone has the right to offer his or her opinion, but I don't think the concept of human rights, freedom of speech, citizenship, religious freedom, women's representation, and respect for the law should be voted on under the 'call for democracy'!

Before we talk about the next elections, and who would be the next Egyptian president, we should first talk about the problem of how to address poverty and unemployment in this country. I know we have been discussing these problems for decades, but I am now not only talking



about them as issues of human rights and human dignity, but also as real challenges standing in the way of democracy and national security. According to the latest numbers announced by the Egyptian state, the unemployment rate in Egypt is 20% and poverty is 44%, with youth making up 90% of those who don't have jobs. My message to the Facebook community and to every-

one raising awareness through the Internet is that we need to talk to the poor rather than investing time talking to ourselves! There are groups out there who are raising awareness among the poor with concepts that are 'anti-democratic', and the poor listen to them because those groups provide them with much needed shelter, food, and resources. If we want Egypt to be democratic, the following issues have to be not only discussed but addressed before we hold elections: social and medical insurance, minimum wage levels, affordable housing, and employment opportunities.

Then, political awareness follows! And with political awareness, I don't mean spelling out to people whom or what they should vote for, because this is the 'anti-democracy' message I am talking about. I don't think there had been a chance since the times of the Pharos when Egyptians were able to select their government. It had always been those people who 'know more' who are controlling the selection process.

“Before we talk about the next elections, we should first talk about the problem of how to address poverty and unemployment.”

The control is not only over the process, but also over what citizens should believe in as 'the best selection'! This is happening now, both intentionally and unintentionally. I don't want to dictate to people what is best for them; I want people to know all the options and then select what they believe is the best for them. This is what I call real democracy. Accordingly, political awareness efforts should tackle important issues like the difference between the parliamentary and presidential system, the role of civil society, and the differences in political thoughts and practices among political parties. Again, these serious discussions won't be digested before we address the urgent and basic needs of Egypt or of any society.

Right now, I am working—and will be working for a long time—on the immediate needs of Egyptians in the areas of poverty and unemployment. I believe community development has to play a significant role in the democratization of Egypt. In fact, I don't believe democracy will ever be achieved if we don't pay attention to these important issues. **Y**

Dr. Raghda El-Ebrashi, who lives in Cairo, is the founder of Alashanek ya Balady Association for Sustainable Development (AYB-SD) in Egypt and is an Ashoka Fellow. She was selected as a YouthActionNet Fellow in 2009 and is currently a member of the IYF Board of Directors.