



The Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship

The second event of Asfari Institute's Feminist Roundtable Series entitled “**Analysing current LGBTQ activism in the region: Who are the new authors of the public narratives?**” was successfully held on April 29, 2021. In a webinar, Tarek Zeidan, Executive Director of Helem, and Khawla Bouaziz, Secretary General of Mawjoudin, had a discussion on the current LGBTQ activism in the Arab region that was moderated by Dr. Carmen Geha, AUB Associate Professor of Public Administration and co-founder of CIBL for Women.

In the discussion, Bouaziz shared how the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted LGBTQ activism in Tunisia, as it further pushed the LGBTQ community down the pyramid of priorities and worsened already existent inequalities. Not only did the activists have to deal with the crisis, but also with police forces and private political groups that always attack the queer movement. In terms of Lebanon, Zeidan discussed how the pandemic, economic crisis, and August 4 Beirut blast created a shift in the queer movement. To achieve human rights, particularly for queer individuals, the movement has shifted from focusing on achieving civil and political rights to focusing on attaining social and economic rights.

The second roundtable discussion revealed the changes and challenges pertaining to LGBTQ activism in the region. Some of the current challenges that the guest speakers shared include the increased need for resources, capacity, and funding to keep up with having to help provide people with their basic needs, may it be providing them with shelter or food. Another challenge mentioned was the lack of regional bodies with which the LGBTQ activists can advocate with.

Moreover, guest speakers shared that responding to the changes and challenges was not a matter of leadership, but rather, it was a matter of survival. As Bouaziz said,

“I don't think that we should romanticize it and say it's, you know, resilience, or courage, or any of that. For me, it's really just, improvise, adapt, overcome, over and over again. It's a continued process of having to, you know, survive, more than anything.”

On a more positive note, the guest speakers shared how LGBTQ organizations in the region work together on projects such as advocacy, awareness, and lobbying, despite not having the same struggles or histories. The collaboration was not only due to the sharing of knowledge of data and knowledge, but also due to the funding for multi-country, regional work that enabled them to do it on a large-scale level.