



Transcript

A Democratic Future for Yemen

Tawakkol Karman

Nobel Prize Laureate 2011, Journalist, Activist and Founder of Women Journalists without Chains

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Ginny Hill:

Thank you very much for bringing us such a clear and hopeful message from Change Square in Sana'a. I'm going to take one question at a time from the audience. If you could raise your hand, if I come to you to speak please wait for the microphone, and please state your name and your affiliation. The gentleman here in the front.

Question 1:

Hello, I'm from Oxfam. Hi Tawakkol, thank you very much for your speech. At Oxfam, we're very worried at the moment about women's rights in Yemen, and we've been working for many years on early marriage, and on legal protection for women in prison. We want to know what you think the international community should do to ensure that women can secure their rights. You know, what steps can we take, we're thinking about quotas even, in the election process, in all the transitional processes. What do you think should happen? What can the international community do to help women in Yemen at the moment?

Tawakkol Karman:

That's a very important question. Because we know that we started the new future for women also when we decided to step down this regime. Because this regime was the first enemy against women. And anyone [who] follow this regime, he will say, he will see, sorry, that Ali Saleh made three speeches against women in the street. He told them to go back to the house, and it's *haram* – it's forbidden, and this is the speech of Ali Saleh – because he was so afraid from women. And he's absolutely right, yes, he's absolutely right. [Applause]

So this is the first step, and it's very important step. But we also know that women in Yemen needs a lot of things. And their priority is to stop early marriage. It's very important point because we know that because of early marriage, most women, they couldn't play their role in the society, participate in public life in a good way in the society. So we struggled for this thing, for you know, early marriage, for making a law against early marriage, before the revolution. What about after the revolution? So be sure that the old demands of women that we carried before the revolution, we will implement it, and we will make many laws that guarantee good rights for women. And we have a list, by the way, we have a list of the laws, and also we have a proposal for many laws, especially the children law. Thank you.

Question 1:

Should the international community back those laws? Should they sign up to your proposal? What should the international community do?

Tawakkol Karman:

If you have any suggestions, just give us. I told all the international community, not just tell me what can we do – you have to offer! We know, one, two, three, how can we help you. In early marriage, give me your business card, I can send you the proposal of law, and if you have any opinion that we have to change this, and we have to make this, we are so welcome. Please do it. Thank you so much.

Ginny Hill:

Ok, we're taking online questions from our viewers streaming live, and I have a question here. It says, what do you think should be done to address the issues of the south, and the Houthis?

Tawakkol Karman:

We published that. We announced that. We announced that in August. In August, in Hadhramaut. We made, we published a political document of youth revolution, and we said our goals, one two three. One: step down the regime and all his family like that. Two: solve the southern issue. Solving it via dialogue in a way which satisfies the southern people. Three: the establishment of a government, or a nation, based on federalism.

So this is our proposal for [the] southern movement, but also we will organize a huge dialogue for all people in Yemen, especially people in the south, they have to discuss the southern issue, and they have to decide what they want. And we know, we told them that we will accept everything that they decide. About the Houthis? Also, we talked about the issue of Sa'ada. It's dialogue. We will make national dialogue. All our problem[s] we'll solve by national dialogue. Together we will solve all our problems. Of course after Saleh!

Ginny Hill:

The gentleman here in the front row, the second row.

Question 2:

When you become president, [applause]... I don't care about the title, when you are there, at the top of the government, will you surprise Yemen and the world to have fifty-fifty male and female in power?

Tawakkol Karman:

Look, I don't believe on that.

Question 2:

You don't?

Tawakkol Karman:

I don't believe on that. I believe that women has to be more than 50 [percent]. Will you accept? That's the question!

[Laughter]

Ginny Hill:

Ok, we'll take some more questions. Can I go to the gentleman here in the front row?

Question 3:

I was wondering whether you could shed light upon the role that could be played by the GCC countries, especially Qatar for example, and its support for certain ideological sectors within Yemen. Would you see it as a positive support or a negative one?

Tawakkol Karman:

About the Gulf Initiative and Qatar's role. The Gulf Initiative has been the worst initiative that's ever been in the history of revolutions. And we refuse it. We refuse it at all. For two reasons. First: the Gulf Initiative is based on immunity [for] the criminal and immunity to the people who are corrupted, who've stolen money off people. And that's against the whole value that we

made our revolution. Why did we make this revolution? If we will – immunity! Not just forgive, immunity! This is number one.

Number two: the mechanism for implementing the treaty, or the Initiative, is based on a mistake, and it's against democracy, for a number of reasons. One: it states that in two months' time, they've got to dismantle all the street occupation, if you like, and disperse basically. In this way, it is against free speech and the freedom to demonstrate. It says that after two months there's only one candidate, and that is the Vice President, Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi. Is this the democracy that we paid so much blood for?

Number three, which is very dangerous: this Initiative is based on the division of spoils, if you like, between the president's party and Al-Mushtaraq, and this is very dangerous. Even within each ministry, it's got to be a fifty-fifty division, it could be that the minister is from one party and the vice minister, or the deputy minister, is from the other party. So it's based on spoiling everything, if you like, on being an obstacle. And this is precisely the same way and the same manner which created the war in 1994. And this Initiative could lead to a civil war. In the same way, the inability to freeze his assets and also not to raise the issues of the international call for [investigation of] crimes against humanity could also lead to civil war.

This is why we refuse it altogether, and we are not party to it in any way. It ignored the youth, the revolutionaries, altogether. It ignored the millions in the street. It transformed the revolution as a political crisis between the government party, or the president's party, and the opposition party. And that's not true. As far as Qatar was concerned, its role was excellent in supporting all Arab spring revolutions. And we are very happy and we are grateful to it.

Ginny Hill:

I'd like to take a question from this gentleman here in the white shirt.

Question 4:

You know that your strongest and most powerful neighbour is Saudi Arabia. I've known the Saudis for many years, the Saudi people, they are all with you. I'm now talking about the people of Saudi Arabia, not the ruling regime. The Saudi people, as you know better than me, are very closely connected, and very much love, the Yemeni people. They are waiting for the Yemeni revolution to succeed for them to start their own. Now, what I want to ask you,

suggest to you, is that if you can, start to contact the Saudi liberal people. And I would mention to you two ladies, Saudis. One of them is Madawi al-Rasheed. Madawi, probably you know her. You know the family of Al-Rasheed were the rulers of Saudi Arabia before the Saud family invaded—

Ginny Hill:

I'm sorry to interrupt you but if you could ask a question?

Question 4:

Yes, my question is, can you get in touch with Madawi al-Rasheed and Mai Yamani, who is the daughter of Dr Yamani who was ex-minister, [inaudible]. And if you want to know more about these two ladies please contact my daughter. My daughter will tell you everything about Madawi and about Mai.

Ginny Hill:

Perhaps you could say something about your view of the Saudi role in this process.

Tawakkol Karman:

Ok. I will not talk a lot about the Saudi role, because all of you know it. It's [a] bad role, full stop. But I don't blame them. I blame the people, the international community, who gave them Yemeni file. I blame that they thought that maybe – I don't know how can they give them this file? They are against our revolution, against democracy, and you tell them, go and help Yemen, and bring solutions to Yemen. I blame the international community for giving the Saudi regime the opportunity to go against the revolution in Yemen. That is transferring, actually, the file, the Yemeni file, to the Saudis, or to the government.

Ginny Hill:

Ok, thank you. I'd like to take another question from this side of the room.

Question 5:

First of all, I want to on a personal note thank you, not just as a representative of Yemen or Arab women but also of Arab people in general. I'm Lebanese, but I look at you, and I hear you speak, and I think it's very inspiring. [Appluase]

So that's great. On that note, I hope, and I wonder, and I'd like you to speak a bit about whether you are planning to tour the Middle East and what you'll say to the people of the Middle East when you do tour.

Tawakkol Karman:

Encouraging them to make revolution! All of them! Full stop. Youth can do a lot. And you have to trust in yourself. You can achieve all your dream, especially in Lebanon. In Lebanon you have to defeat the sectarian rule. And you will win.

Ginny Hill:

I'm going to go actually for favouritism here, and ask Kate Nevens, in the back – Kate Nevens, from the Middle East programme here at Chatham House.

Question 6:

It seemed from those of us that were watching that your demonstration outside the UN in New York was incredibly effective. I was just wondering, obviously the UN has been pushing for the GCC Initiative, but potentially behind the scenes they have some power over asset freezing, or threatening asset freezing. I was wondering if you see the role of the UN as being positive, and also whether you think they are listening to the voices of the revolution.

Tawakkol Karman:

The role of the United Nations is excellent, and the statements by Ban Ki-moon were even better. On 18 October, his statement was very important, especially that he declared that the United Nations will not give any immunity to killers of innocent people. At the moment, there is a shortcoming in its role. Especially that Bin Omar is the one who is engaged in the mechanism, the

implementation mechanism. He tried to steer away from the section on immunity and guarantees, but he failed to do so. Because Section 9 [of the GCC Initiative] stated that there must be a start on creating laws in order to implement all aspects of the mechanism of the Initiative.

Ginny Hill:

Is there anyone at the back of the room that would like to ask a question? Ok, somebody right there in the corner.

Question 7:

I was very touched by your reflections on the revolution as that of a shared struggle and a shared emotional experience. You said people living together, sleeping together, and dying together. But could you offer some insights into your own personal emotional journey – where do you draw your own courage and optimism from, and how has that changed over the course of the revolution?

Tawakkol Karman:

I can't speak about myself. You can go ask people about me. But I can't really. I live with people, and I saw the people, they are doing much and struggling.

Ginny Hill:

There's several people down here. I'd like to take this gentleman here in the front row. Second row, sorry.

Question 8:

My small question is, Yemenis in Yemen have done marvellous achievements in the last ten months, and the youth in particular. But are you aware there are twice as many Yemenis worldwide, in east and west of the world. What is your message for the Yemenis across the globe, and how can they support the work and activities of the youth in Yemen? Thank you.

Tawakkol Karman:

Three points. One: pressurize. Pressurize as much as you can for the freezing of assets. Secondly, you have to push hard to transfer [Saleh's] case to the International Criminal Court. Thirdly, prepare yourselves to go back and build the new Yemen.

[Applause]

Ginny Hill:

Can we go over here, to the man in the pink shirt?

Question 9:

I am from the Yemeni Revolution UK who started demonstrations in England generally since day one of the revolution in Yemen. My question is, Ali Abdullah Saleh and his regime has been in power for 33 years. They did a lot of corruption, and actually they made corruption the way of dealing inside the country. And that has a reflection on the Yemeni people, whether they are inside Yemen or outside Yemen. I want you to – or what's your message to the international community, or to the British government and the European Union? What is their role in educating people, or what are the things that they will be offering to the Yemeni people to get them out of that corruption, to get them out of that way of life?

Tawakkol Karman:

The last question? Can you ask it in Arabic?

[Questioner repeats his question in Arabic]

Tawakkol Karman:

There is no other principle more important than accountability. Accountability is the best and the first process against corruption. This is why we refuse the Gulf Initiative. Because they want us to build a country without accountability. They want us to build a country that is based on corruption. There is nothing better than action. Anybody who has misused power must be brought to justice or must be held accountable. And also in the future, the same thing applies. The proposed, or the constitution which we will propose, must contain a section in it which is very strong on accountability or creating the

mechanisms for actually [holding] people to account, in an easy way and in a facilitating way. Unlike the old constitution, which prevents you actually from bringing those people to book, to be accountable.

Ginny Hill:

There's a gentleman here who's been signalling to come in for a while. If I could ask you to make it very short, and Tawakkol to be brief in your answer.

Question 10:

First, as you know, we are here about 99.5 percent supporting the revolution, and we are welcoming Tawakkol to UK. Second thing, as you know in politics, as in life, not everything is wrong, and not everything is right. And we have to be some sort of pragmatic in this stage. We shouldn't put every people now and create more enemies to the revolution. We should get what is ever possible from the Gulf Initiative, from the new government, from anybody can do any steps. Unfortunately the revolution couldn't achieve its goals within these nine months, but—

Ginny Hill:

Could you ask a question?

Question 10:

The question, because now, the international community have given us this good chance by giving Tawakkol the Nobel Prize and make her an international figure. So I think she should concentrate on being a politician [rather] than a revolutionist.

Tawakkol Karman:

I took this prize because [of] my role in revolution. But I want to answer, I want to answer on this question. To believe that we can take whatever is good for us, the nice bits of it, from the Gulf Initiative, it's a good idea. There are two sections which are important: [Saleh's] signature, which heralded the end of his regime, and that has been actually achieved. And the second one is the formation of a committee which is to unify the army. And that's the one that hasn't been achieved yet. Ali Saleh will most certainly do his best to

frustrate that. He doesn't want that army to unify, and for that reason he's going to push the country into civil war. If the Gulf Council Initiative can unify the army, then yes, we'll... the unification of the army without Ahmed, Ali, Yahya, Ammar, Tariq and Ali Muhsin, it will be a great idea.

Ginny Hill:

I'm afraid we're going to have to finish now. But it really is a pleasure to have you here, and I hope that you will come back and tell us more about how things are developing over the course of the next few years. Thank you.

Tawakkol Karman:

Thank you, thank you so much.