



MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA RULE OF LAW CONFERENCE 2010*
*The Road to Justice in MENA: National, International,
And Traditional Justice Systems Working Together*

June 25-26, 2010
Ifrane, Morocco

Conference Report

Overview:

In a stimulating and youth-led atmosphere, over 150 prominent leaders throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region convened on June 25-26, 2010, at the World Justice Project's (WJP) first major MENA Regional Rule of Law Conference at Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Morocco.

With the convergence of an unparalleled number of regional leaders, the MENA Conference represented an unprecedented opportunity to encourage regional commitment to Rule of Law; promote interdisciplinary understanding of Rule of Law and Access to Justice issues in the broadest sense (legal, political, social, and economic); and develop the cross-fertilization of different ideas among participants through the prism of national, regional, and international standards.

Conference discussions fell under the broad theme of Access to Justice given the region's growing concern with this issue. The Conference discussions explored the concept of Access to Justice in legal, political, social, economic, and cultural contexts related to the notions of 'rights' and 'justice' for all people, especially disadvantaged groups. The Conference program focused on the barriers to Access to Justice, through topics such as: the national legal frameworks for Access to Justice in the MENA region, good practices to raise awareness by people of their basic legal rights, and the impact of strengthening Access to Justice through multidisciplinary coalitions and partnerships.

This action-oriented Conference illustrated the WJP's continuing belief that promotion of Rule of Law is the most effective long-term antidote to the most pressing problems facing the MENA region today. Conference participants developed creative cross-disciplinary action plans to address the identified issues and bring them to fruition. Assembling into small, issue-specific working groups, the participants used presentations from plenary sessions as a basis to frame their discussions and inform their action plans. In turn, these action-stimulating plans demonstrated great regional and disciplinary diversity, ranging from capacity building and aid services for the poor, to Rule of Law education for women and youth, and assessing and improving adherence to environmental compliance laws.

Participation:

The Conference met its goal of attracting over 150 leaders from over 29 countries from such diverse disciplines as education, engineering, human rights, law, environment, business and finance. The Conference

targeted participants from countries and sub-regions previously under-represented in WJP programs. The age distribution of participants was spread out with the majority ranging between 30 and 60. This diverse group was dynamic and engaged with the Conference program. Please click [here](http://www.mena2010wjp.org/wp-content/upload/2010/08/Annex-1-Participant-Roster.pdf) (<http://www.mena2010wjp.org/wp-content/upload/2010/08/Annex-1-Participant-Roster.pdf>) for the list of **Conference participants**.

Most participants said they participated to debate key Rule of Law concerns in the region through the prism of national, regional, and international standards. The convening of a distinct number of regional leaders represented an unprecedented opportunity to promote the cross-fertilization of different ideas among participants, and generate cross-disciplinary plans to enhance government accountability, protect fundamental human rights, create more fair and efficient legal processes, and improve Access to Justice. Assembling into small, issue-specific working group sessions, Conference participants used presentations from plenary sessions to frame their discussions and inform their action plans.

Keynote Presentations:

Conference presentations and panels offered multinational and multidisciplinary perspectives on Rule of Law issues critical to the MENA region. A particular focus was the relation between international, national, and traditional justice mechanisms. Many presentations also centered on recent advancements in the Rule of Law in the region. Access to Justice for marginalized groups—women in particular—and the connection between the Rule of Law and economic development were frequently addressed themes.

Al Akhawayn University President Driss Ouauicha led a panel discussion on the importance of the Rule of Law to the MENA Region. He was joined by Qatar University President Sheikha Al-Misnad, Former Prime Minister of Algeria Ahmed Benbitour, Former President of Romania Emil Constantinescu, and Al Jazeera International's Abderrahim Foukara.

Hosting the Conference in Morocco was an important expression of Morocco's dedication to advancing an understanding of justice and Rule of Law in the MENA region. Moreover, Morocco was highlighted as a case study for judicial reforms using a multidisciplinary approach in a keynote panel discussion led by Former Chief Justice of Brazil Ellen Gracie Northfleet, Director of Legal Affairs of the League of Arab States Ehab Makram, Tunisian Minister of Justice and Human Rights Lazhar Boubouny, and leading social anthropologist and Islamic law specialist Ziba Mir-Hosseini. The Conference site, the renowned Al Akhawayn University, served as a nurturing environment that stimulated the lively interchange of ideas between the diverse Conference participants.

Morocco's experience served as a template for the exchange of ideas among the diverse countries present at the Conference. Morocco's recent reforms have made significant headway in the area of judicial reforms which go beyond the judiciary and encompass the entire justice system, following an inclusive interdisciplinary approach. The 2004 reform of the Moroccan Family Law, the *Moudawana*, is just one of the many examples of how societies grapple with balancing the ideals of tradition, justice and Rule of Law with the imperative of making society safer and more just for its citizens. Furthermore, Morocco's Human Development Initiative is unquestionably a landmark in Morocco's recent human and social development history, as it gives top political priority to people's living conditions (especially youth and women) and their access to basic social infrastructure and services. As Dr. Foukara, Al Jazeera Washington's Bureau Chief described at the Conference: "Not only is there a lively debate about Rule of Law going on in Morocco, but its history and its geography also provide a very unique prism through which to look at the legal uniqueness of the MENA region at large."

Moulay Ahmed Al Iraki, Wali of Diwan al Madalim, Ghzioul Berrada Moroccan Ministry of Justice Spokesperson, and former Ambassador of the League of Arab States Clovis Maksoud, delivered the Conference's opening and closing keynote addresses, respectively.

Conference participants were also presented with a Conference report drawn from the WJP Rule of Law Index analyzing countries' adherence of the Rule of Law in the MENA region. The report, based on the Index's conceptual framework and methodology, profiled seven countries in the MENA region (Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates).

Apart from the busy academic agenda in Ifrane, the participants could also enjoy a unique cultural and sightseeing program provided by the Province of Ifrane.

Working Sessions and Multidisciplinary Action Plans to advance the Rule of Law across MENA:

The MENA Rule of Law Conference included ten small, structured working group sessions in which participants developed concrete multidisciplinary action plans to advance the Rule of Law across the region. In these sessions, participants discussed what specific actions they will take to improve the Rule of Law in the months following the Conference. **Summaries of the working group sessions** can be accessed [here](http://www.mena2010wjp.org/wp-content/upload/2010/08/Annex-2-Action-Plans.xls) (http://www.mena2010wjp.org/wp-content/upload/2010/08/Annex-2-Action-Plans.xls). It should be noted that these action plans are in the process of being refined and finalized in coordination with members of the groups.

Post-Conference Activities to Sustain Long-Term Impact:

Generally, Conference participants agreed that challenges to implementing and respecting the Rule of Law are so immense, that they cannot be possibly taken up by one group: "The ideals need to be built from the bottom up...we need to empower the underserved groups and create an enabling environment for civil society and advocacy."

Furthermore, the fact that MENA societies are closely interconnected culturally and politically, do not necessarily mean they would or should have identical debates about how to interpret Rule of Law or how to apply it. As such, with the convening of such a diverse group of stakeholders at the MENA Conference, the WJP has enabled a distinct dialogue to start to promote interdisciplinary understanding of Rule of Law and Access to Justice challenges to incubate sustainable actions, and to have long-lasting impact in the region, especially through:

- **The Launch of the MENA Rule of Law Network Online Forum**

The Network serves as a starting point for establishing a formalized network of regional stakeholders, to maintain and monitor cross-disciplinary partnerships initiated in Morocco. The WJP hopes the dialogue that takes place at the MENA Conference will resonate far beyond the meeting and serve as a catalyst for new debates and actions among regional leaders, policy makers, academics, civil society, and citizens. More information is available at www.mena2010wjp.org.

- **The Launch of the Opportunity Fund MENA Competition**

At the MENA Conference, the WJP announced that it will open its seed grant program, the Opportunity Fund, to proposed Rule of Law initiatives begun as action plans during the Conference. The Opportunity Fund seeks to build a worldwide constituency of stakeholders from a variety of professional backgrounds committed to taking action to advance the rule of law. Each seed grant-funded program is designed to address a concrete Rule of Law problem through innovative, sustainable, and replicable programs.

- **Mohamed V University Horizons Journal MENA Conference Special Edition**

The WJP, in partnership with Morocco's Mohamed V University, will publish post-Conference papers in the University's renowned academic journal Horizons on work that corresponds with the Conference themes and working session topics. Conference participants and speakers will lead the effort to produce the studies. This scholarly work will continue the discussions begun at the Conference. The effort will inform scholars, civil society, policymakers, and other interested persons about the themes and action plans developed at the Conference, and point the way towards positive reform of the Rule of Law in the MENA region.

Finally, MENA countries are highly diverse, and their areas of greatest need for Rule of Law support and development vary depending on their particular contexts. By supporting an increased exchange of experiences, encouraging open discussions and public debate and offering financial, technical, and educational assistance, the WJP has an important role to fulfill the task of moving forward. The WJP plans to continue supporting innovative initiatives in the region to advance Rule of Law and extend its benefits of opportunity and equity to more countries.

Evaluation Results:

Participants were excited about the multidisciplinary nature of the Conference. The meeting brought together players from such diverse disciplines as education, engineering, human rights, law, business and finance.

Furthermore, Conference participants were satisfied to see that all issues were discussed in the prism of international, national, as well as traditional legal standards. To proclaim a uniform definition and application of the Rule of Law in such a diverse environment is difficult. Furthermore, developing a regional standard—one appropriate for all political and legal systems across the region—might be seen as far too complex to attempt.

*The World Justice Project MENA Rule of Law Conference is the 7th regional action-oriented multidisciplinary meeting organized by the WJP, following six meetings on five continents in 2007-2009. These regional gatherings have engaged disciplinary leaders from 78 countries who identified critical areas where collaborative cross-disciplinary efforts will advance the Rule of Law. Many of these leaders attended the first and second World Justice Forums and are now carrying forward on-the-ground work to strengthen the Rule of Law worldwide.