

No National Liberation without Women's Liberation: translating Algeria's feminist bloc

Monday 5 August 2019, by [Al-Muzāharāt, Collective / Multiple signers](#) (Date first published: 9 May 2019).

“Algeria is a laboratory: everything here is re-invented, even language, which, joyfully, we twist, we stretch, in order that it speaks the epoch” — Rosa Moussassaoui, 4 April, for *l'Humanité*.

Below are two declarations of one such re-invention. In the first (Fr), the Algerian Women for Change towards Equality (المرأة الجزائرية من أجل التغيير؛ AWCE) announce themselves. In the second (Ar), published three weeks after, the group responds to attacks against their weekly bloc.

In a [19 April report](#), Malia Bouattia details the Algerian state's 9 April repressive turn, including police assaults against women protestors; however, the second declaration here refers to 29 March attacks, without identifying the group or tendencies involved.

16 March Declaration

We are currently living through a magnificent, popular, peaceful uprising against the current political system. The huge presence of women at the rallies is testimony to a profound transformation of our society, and demands the recognition of women's rights, in an equal Algeria.

This system has ruled absolutely since independence, and used all coercive and autocratic means to defeat every impulse for change and democratisation of the country. Besides the destruction of the Republic's institutions (health, education, justice, culture, etc.), and the beggaring of political life (the corruption, the authoritarianism and social injustices), this system has practiced a Machiavellian strategy of maintaining and reinforcing inequalities throughout society — for which Algerian women have paid a high price, at the symbolic, formal and concrete levels.

Indeed, the history of the Algerian struggles testifies to a huge engagement of women in all the just, decisive struggles the country has fought: the War of National Liberation; the construction of the independent Algerian state; the October 1988 revolt; the trade union, student and democratic struggles before and after October 1988; and the struggle against the armed *intégriste* ['Islamist'] groups through the 1990s, etc.

Side-by-side with men, women have conceived, developed, and lead these fights, in the hope of building an egalitarian society, and of seeing the concrete equality realised during those difficult moments becoming an indisputable gain.

Unfortunately, this promised equality has not yet arrived. The mass education of girls and procession of qualified graduates; our still more significant presence in the world of work; and even the legislative change and rulings, grasped after decades of struggle, have still not allowed women to escape their *minorisation* [i.e., women's minor status, as codified in the 1984 Family Code] and

second-class status across the institutions, in a society that remains patriarchal.

The active, unconditional participation of Algerian women in the 22 February Movement compels us to reaffirm our determination to change the current system, in its entirety, including its sexist, its patriarchal, and its misogynist elements.

On the 16 March, a meeting of Algiers women was held. From this debate, and a wider consultation, came the following:

- We, the women signatories of this declaration, are convinced that the building of our collective future will not happen without full and complete equality between men and women, without gender, class, regional or religious distinctions.
- We must continue to always be present with our colleagues and neighbors, in order to continue this beautiful *mixité* ['mixedness'; an obsessive fear of the *Front islamique du Salut*] in all the marches, but also to render our demand for equality more visible.
- We have decided to form a feminist bloc, which will be in place every Friday from 1pm, outside the main entrance of Algiers I university.
- We encourage and support similar initiatives across all of Algeria, and we subscribe entirely to all declarations which believe that equality between men and women is one of the priorities for changing the current system.
- We call on all women who recognise themselves in this appeal to add their signatures to ours, to join the feminist bloc here or elsewhere, or to initiate them (as conditions permit), and to participate in our meetings, the date and place of which will be publicly communicated
- We call for a joint representation of women to be taken into account for every citizens' initiative towards the ending of this crisis.
- We condemn all harassment during demonstrations.

April 7 Declaration

The declaration follows the violent attacks that women of the feminist bloc were exposed to on Friday 29 March in the capital, the ensuing serious threats against the physical and psychological well-being of many women (including women outside the bloc), and, in addition, the online attacks and harassment that continue up to the time of writing.

With regards to the Friday 5 April protest, Algerian Women for Change Towards Equality decided to maintain the feminist bloc without raising banners, in order to avoid any form of violence or appropriating [of the bloc], and so that we are not used as an excuse to disturb the peaceful image of the popular movement.

On 5 April the feminist bloc was begun between 12.30 pm and 13.30 pm without any incident, in front the main entrance of Algiers I university, in the capital, and provided a genuine space for discussion and dialogue between men and women protesters, after which we joined the larger protest.

Algerian Women for Change Towards Equality announce the following:

- We have not abandoned our legitimate demands for social justice.
- We condemn any form of violence directed towards protesters, especially women, whether during or after the demonstrations.
- We are not the exclusive representatives of the feminist movement in Algeria, and therefore cannot be held accountable for the activities of other groups, including the group responsible for distributing leaflets concerning the Family Code

- We reiterate that our initiative intends neither to represent nor to be the voice of all Algerian women, but rather to advocate for a society that values and strengthens equality between citizens.
- We reiterate that our civil, national, and independent initiative is a product of the will of a group of women, the majority of whom are militants who do not belong to any organisation, whether at the national or international level.
- We are aware that the current regime has tried and still tries to politicise social issues to create division between the opposition movements.
- We reject every accusation against us directed towards us of dividing and splitting the unity and cohesion of the popular movement — we remain alert to this.
- We salute the solidarity and support of all types that we have received from women and men who have condemned violence, and have joined our rally.

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Signatories to the 16 March Declaration:

Fatma Boufenik, Teacher-researcher at University Oran 2; founding member of Femmes Algériennes Revendiquant leurs Droits (FARD; Algerian Women Demand their Rights); Amina Izarouken, feminist; Faïka Medjahed, psychoanalyst, member of the Wassila network; Souad Bensaâda, feminist militant; Belhacene Atiqa, feminist; Kahina Arezki, resident doctor; Louisa Ait Hamou, feminist, lecturer; Leïla Saadna, feminist militant, producer and teacher; Amel Hadjadj, feminist militant; Fatma Oussedik, sociologist, feminist; Sanaâ Hamadouche, feminist; Sara Bouchair, feminist militant; Farida Bouchenaf, feminist militant; Dalila Bouchenaf, feminist militant.

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