

Report of Ms Gabriele Molitor (Germany)

The role of women in the new governances

It was a long road from the introduction of women's suffrage in Germany in 1918 to Angela Merkel's election as German Chancellor in 2005. And even though one of the world's most powerful women hails from Germany, we still have some way to go: the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Report 2011 ranks the Federal Republic of Germany a mere 15th in terms of political empowerment. We must therefore continue to take action to ensure women's equal participation in politics in Germany.

We have been following the Arab Spring with great interest, as women, too, have taken to the streets to demand democracy, freedom, and – not least – their rights.

But while women were at the forefront of the protests, they are now barely represented in the new political bodies and institutions. Most of the few women who have succeeded in entering the new parliaments are themselves highly religious and, unfortunately, are far too often uninterested in the introduction of additional rights for women. This despite the fact that the transition from dictatorships to democracies should be a historic opportunity to include women in policy-making and, at last, end the longstanding structural inequality in the treatment of women. But extending women's rights cannot be a task for female politicians alone – men, too, must work towards a society where women and men enjoy equal rights.

It is encouraging, however, that female journalists and bloggers from the Arab world are reporting that a shift in values is starting to take place in their societies and that awareness of women's rights is slowly beginning to grow.

Many women are remaining active in politics and are continuing to work for women's rights; one example was the "Women's Day of Anger" in Tripoli, when protests took place against the Transitional Council's patriarchal structures.

And so we hope that women will continue to engage with politics, so that women will win seats in Parliament in the coming years and we will soon be able to add a woman from the Arab world to the growing list of female heads of government.

I would be pleased to receive further information in future about the role of women and their participation in the new political systems.