

Political reforms need of hour: Tamim

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The Second Forum on Democracy and Reform in the Arab World kicked off at the Doha Sheraton yesterday with a call for meaningful political reforms and for promoting the true spirit of democracy, freedom of speech and tolerance in the Arab world.

Opening the forum, the Heir Apparent H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani said that democracy and development should go hand-in-hand and one can not be postponed on the pretext of the other.

H H Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al Missned was present at the opening ceremony, along with H H Sheikh Abdullah bin Khalifa Al Thani, the Personal Adviser to the Emir; Prime Minister and Foreign Minister H E Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem bin Jabor Al Thani, and a host of dignitaries.

The three-day conference is being organised by the National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) under the patronage of the Emir H H Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani

Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad said that democracy and development are two concerns shared by all Arab countries. Hence, they must be tackled in a wide scope, transcending the narrow borders of any one definite country to take into consideration an uneasy challenge faced by the entire region.

“The relation between democracy and development is similar to that of two hands where the one cannot perform efficiently if not supported by the other. Therefore, it would be a mistake to postpone democratic reform with the pretext of being engaged in executing development or justifying the failure in development performance with the pretext that voices have been raised demanding democracy,” he said.

He urged the participants not to stop at discussing conceptions and making conclusions, but to go further and explore the proper programmes of action for supporting democracy and reform in the Arab region.

Stressing the importance of good governance, the Heir Apparent said: “Democracy means participation from the base to the top and establishing the state of law in which all rights are respected. This can only be achieved under good governance.

“That is why I hope that your meeting would consider the best means for promoting the status of the civil society and qualifying it as it is a strategic partner in establishing democracy and reform and achieving development.” He also underlined the importance of involving the youth in development and building of a democratic society and cited the Doha Asian Games as a successful example of youth participation.

“We must realise that the broad base in our communities, which is represented by the youth sector, constitutes a source of power and a factor of progress once considered a basic part in popular participation in decision making. I cite here an experience we lived in Qatar few months ago where the volunteers from the youth of this country had an effective role in the success of the activities of the Asian Games when they showed a high degree of enthusiasm

for participation,” said the Heir Apparent.

Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad concluded his speech by saying: “Nothing is more needed for the success of reform and opening the doors for participation in this nation than the youth generation, who have paid a high price, despite their young age, when they fell before those closed doors as victims of frustration and extremism.”

Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall, former Chairman of the Military Council in Mauritania, and former Sudanese president Abdurrahman Siwar Al Dahab, also spoke at the opening session. Colonel Vall praised Qatar’s strong support for the democratic reforms programme implemented in Mauritania over the past transitional period. This pioneering programme was not a mere individual act carried out by a single person. It was accomplished thanks to the collective efforts of the Mauritanian people, said Vall, who lost the free and democratic presidential elections he himself organised recently.

“Never before had been a peaceful rotation of authority in Mauritania, which has sustained successive crises and coups. Therefore, the change in the political system was a must to rectify the defects and rebuild a viable system,” he noted.

The former Sudanese president lamented the campaigns of hostility and misrepresentation being waged against the Muslim world. He said, the challenges of democracy and human rights can not be met unless citizens are allowed to practice their civil rights, including participation in decision making and accountability, in a democratic system.

He hailed the conference as a major turning point in the history of Arab peoples because it helps ushering them into a new era of progress and helps narrowing the gap between them and other peoples of the world.

Over 500 delegates representing civil society groups, political parties and human rights organisations across the Arab world and few other countries are attending the conference.