Arab Reform Initiative

Press Release, 11 August 2022

ARI announces the winner of the 2022 Student Essay Contest



(Paris – 11 August 2022) The Arab Reform Initiative (ARI) announced today the winner of its 2022 Student Essay Contest Award addressing the question of "How can different social movements overcome social divisions when lobbying for feminist policies?".

The winning essay, submitted by Hamza Bensouda, a Moroccan student from Agadir who recently graduated with a master's degree in Comparative Politics from Sciences Po Paris, analyses the reasons behind the effectiveness of the feminist movement in Morocco which succeeded in pushing for change in the Family Code (2004) and the proclamation of gender equality in the 2011 Constitution. It argues that success was built around an anonymized identity centered on the movement's history rather than on specific female figureheads, a diversity of members that brought to the women's movement complexity and completeness that is necessary for its cohesion and its ability to attract more women, and a clear statement of grievances as a critical strategy to overcome social divisions.

ARI's annual Student Essay Contest is meant to encourage university students to think critically and actively engage with issues that are at the heart of the challenges and opportunities facing the Middle East and North Africa region today. As part of the Award, the winning essay is published in English and Arabic on the Arab Reform Initiative's website and receives a prize of USD500.

"This year's submissions addressed how social movements - particularly feminist movements – overcome internal and external challenges when advocating for change. Congratulations to the winner who reviewed the Moroccan feminist movement's rich experience in overcoming challenges and put forward interesting recommendations to make this achievable in other contexts," said Nadim Houry, ARI's Executive Director.

The 2022 Student Essay Contest included submissions from students registered in different universities in the Middle East, North Africa, Europe, and the Gulf. The essays were judged on the strength and relevance of their argumentation by a panel of six members of ARI's researchers and fellows who come from across the region.

“Through this competition, ARI proves that students have interesting answers to the crucial questions that will become more prominent in the next decades. Being named the winner of this year’s contest is an honor and a testament to ARI's commitment to promoting the next generation of researchers in the region. I can only hope that contribution will inspire others to see in the Arab region the strength of engaged and thoughtful youth,” said the winner Hamza Bensouda.

Hamza’s research interests revolve around gender, state and violence in the MENA region, with a focus on the Maghreb. He is also the co-founder of Socie’tea, a podcast on Maghreb societies, cultures and history, and the founder of La Revue du Maghreb. He has a particular interest in the North African region which he studies and analyzes through his journalistic work. Hamza is also a poet and singer.

This year's contest sought to engage participants with issues ARI is tackling through its project, Supporting Arab Women at the Table (SAWT). The SAWT project seeks to increase women’s meaningful inclusion quantitatively and qualitatively in political and peace processes in the MENA region. Taking a broader and more holistic view of what “peace processes” mean and look like and focusing on the emergence of a new generation of women activists in MENA, it proposes specific areas of work and involves collaboration with civil society actors, academics, activists, and networks in both Europe and the MENA region.

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About Arab Reform Initiative

The Arab Reform Initiative is the leading independent Arab think tank working with expert partners in the Middle East and North Africa and beyond to articulate a home-grown agenda for democratic change. It conducts research and policy analysis and provides a platform for inspirational voices based on the principles of diversity, impartiality and social justice.

- We produce original research informed by local experiences and partner with institutions to achieve impact across the Arab world and globally
- We empower individuals and institutions to develop their own concept of policy solutions
- We mobilize stakeholders to build coalitions for positive change

Our aim is to see vibrant democratic societies emerge and grow in the region.

Founded in 2005, the Arab Reform Initiative is governed by a Plenary of its members and an Executive Committee.

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