

Manifesto for a secular, democratic and republican Algeria

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Manifesto for a secular, democratic and republican(1) Algeria

By collective of signatories (*)

The citizens' movement of February 22, 2019 marked a turning point in the history of our country. Thanks to this historic mobilization, our collective dignity has been regained. Our word is free again. We got back into motion. To dream and hope for better days for our children. This new popular dynamic precipitated the downfall of President Bouteflika and his immediate entourage. Despite this acceleration in history, the essential remains to be accomplished.

The crisis affecting our country is unprecedented. The blockage we are experiencing is not conjunctural but structural. Replacing one team with another does not guarantee the emergence of a fruitful horizon. The current power may pretend to be renewing itself, but it is only a vestige of the past. Indeed, the state as it was created in the wake of the national liberation movement has exhausted all its possibilities and reached its limits. It is therefore a question of redefining the foundations of a new social contract. This is the main challenge to be taken up. Which state do we want for what kind of society?

Certainly, since February 22, 2019, great steps have been taken. Hope for change is on everyone's lips and our national unity has been consolidated across the country around the desire and will for a radical break with the system and the rejection of violence. The Amazigh emblem has acquired national legitimacy, thus consolidating our nation in its cultural and linguistic plurality. In an exceptional synergy, the citizen movement has brought together several generations and counts in its ranks both women and young people. The mobilization swept through the diasporas, in Europe and in the Americas, giving the movement an international dimension.

If the movement gives the impression today of being immobile, it is because of a major pitfall. Obviously, the pandemic is temporarily slowing the course of the movement but the problem lies elsewhere. Political Islam has not given up on its project of Islamising the state and society. It just changed strategy. Faced with its hidden ambitions, Democrats are divided. Some of them want its trivialisation and have taken the initiative to create the conditions for its participation in the transition process. However, the very existence of this movement, far from being "normal", represents a permanent threat to the stability and well-being of our nation. If Islamism has never asked for forgiveness for the crimes of which it was guilty during the last decades, it is because it considers that "its" violence is a legitimate violence as soon as it takes on a religious cover. Under these conditions, envisioning a democratic and peaceful transition necessarily involves a double break: a break with the rentier system and a break with political Islam. We, secular women and men, citizens who militate for the double rupture, share in this Manifesto, seven proposals to create the conditions for a peaceful and

democratic transition. We call on our fellow citizens to mobilize in favor of a secular, democratic and republican Algeria.

1. Proclaim the secular character of the state: separate the political and religious spheres

We, women and men, secular citizens who militate for the double break, strongly reaffirm our attachment to secularism: the humanist principle of separation of the temporal and the spiritual. Politics and religion belong to distinct spheres, each responding to different imperatives. Their dissociation and the recognition of their autonomy is a fundamental given of modernity which allows the emancipation of the individual, the emergence of citizenship and the recognition of popular sovereignty. The secular character of the Algerian state must be clearly defined in the Constitution. Therefore, the provision which states that “Islam is the religion of the state” must be repealed in the constitution. It should be noted that secularism is not a war against religions but a humanist principle which guarantees absolute respect for the human person, affirms the equality of all (women and men) before the law and ensures everyone the freedom to hold ideas, convictions or beliefs of his choice. In a secular state, religions are a private matter. The political parties founded on this basis are doomed to disappear since religion is not intended to serve the political and ideological purposes of any singular movement whatsoever.

2. Repeal the Family Code and guarantee the independence of the judiciary

We, women and men, secular citizens who militate for the double break, demand the repeal of the family code and the establishment of egalitarian laws between women and men. The enactment in 1984 of this code, a pledge of power for the Islamists, was in violation of the Constitution, which advocates equality between men and women. Algeria, which ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1996, must fully adhere to this international treaty and lift all its reservations. In a secular and democratic state, the only source of law is positive law and not religious canons, the separation of powers (legislative, executive, judicial) is recognized and the independence of the judiciary is respected.

3. Guarantee the primacy of the political over the military

We, women and men, secular citizens who militate for the double rupture, in the continuity of the spirit of the Soummam Statement (2), make our own the principle of the primacy of the political over the military. The military is not intended to take the place of politics, nor to interfere in the management of state affairs. While the ANP (National Popular Army) cannot serve a particular group, its essential mission is to protect the country, to ensure its unity, and to preserve the republican character of the state.

4. Emancipate the individual through education and culture

We, women and men, secular citizens who militate for the double break, celebrate reason, critical thinking, science as well as culture. School is the making of the future. This is why Algeria must work for a school of knowledge and rationality, an emancipatory school, a melting pot for citizens, which rejects authoritarian tutelage and indoctrination through the development of critical thinking. It must also assume the plural and thousands-year-old character of the Algerian identity. History must be rethought on a scientific basis to enable it to fully play its role in democratic debate. The place given to popular languages deserves a

total reconsideration. In an increasingly complex world, the best guarantee of success is quality education and the integration of culture into learning. However, the Algerian school is devastated. If all attempts at reform have failed, it is because of its shameless instrumentalization by the Islamo-conservatives. Our children must no longer be hostages in these sterile struggles. Both the school and the university must prepare the individual to distinguish between what is belief and what is knowledge.

5. Respect freedom of expression, freedom of the press and the universality of human rights

We women and men, secular citizens who militate for the double break, are convinced that the free expression of ideas is as necessary as freedom of the press and freedom of association. These freedoms dearly acquired through the struggles of our people since independence must be protected and consolidated. However, today, a terrible threat hangs over activists engaged in the citizen movement and journalists are imprisoned for the simple fact of having exercised their profession. We demand the immediate release of journalists and all prisoners of conscience.

6. Put the economy in a productive perspective by breaking the circuits of rent, fighting corruption and consolidating the public service

The almost exclusive use of oil revenues for consumption has devitalized the country and mortgaged its future. This, combined with the effects of Islamist terrorism, has driven many graduates into exile and pushed young people into the harka (3). We, women and men, secular citizens who militate for the double rupture, consider that it is imperative to rebuild the economy on a radically new basis to make it a real lever for the development of the country through the production of material wealth, to reduce the plague of unemployment and work for social justice. A system linked in such a suicidal way to the oil rent and whose blind spot is the productive economy, cannot release the energies necessary to ensure the development of the country.

7. Consolidate Algeria's place in the world

The international context in which Algeria operates is deleterious. The military attacks by the United States and certain European countries against Syria and Iraq and those directed against Libya have seriously weakened the foundations of the nation-states of the Middle East and North Africa. Added to this are rivalries and interference from Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Iran. In addition, Turkish maneuvers in the Mediterranean, political instability in Tunisia, the collapse of the Libyan state and the crisis in Mali make it difficult to manage the borders of our country, especially since it remains a privileged target of international Islamist terrorism. Faced with such a geopolitical situation, we, women and men, secular citizens who militate for the double rupture, plead for the political and economic sovereignty of our country and urge our people to remain vigilant and mobilized to thwart any attempt of foreign interference in the internal affairs of Algeria and any aim of seizure or dismemberment of its national territory.

Notes:

1. For US readers: In the Algerian context, the term “Republican” strictly refers to people who stand for a Republic, i.e. against a theocracy.

2. The Soummam Congress was held on August 20, 1956, inside Algeria in the Soummam valley, during the liberation struggle. It brought together freedom fighters from the guerrilla and representatives of the Algerian national armies that were stationed on the borders with Tunisia and Morocco. It produced a political document known as ‘ the Soummam Platform’.
3. Harka: This refers to the youth who try to cross the Mediterranean sea on makeshift boats, in order to reach Europe.

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