



When speaking of corruption, Kofi Annan said: “Corruption is an insidious plague that has a wide range of corrosive effects on societies. It [...] leads to violations of human rights [...] and allows organized crime, terrorism and other threats to human security to flourish.”¹

To understand the relationship between corruption and the violation of human rights that the former UN General Secretary referred to, one must reflect on the manifestations of corruption, and the aspects of human rights violation.

Generally, corrupt acts can be viewed in the abusive use of power and resources (both public and private) for unethical and personal benefit. These acts can happen on a day-to-day scale in administrations (petty corruption) and on a national high level of political office (grand corruption).

Today, anti-corruption policies and strategies set by governments are largely merged with the good governance agenda and the development discourse.² These two concepts are mostly analyzed through a human rights lens. This supports Kofi Annan’s statement in which he relates corruption to human rights.

However, to give evidence to this view, two questions must be considered; “Whose rights? And which rights?” Tunisia is a good example to look at when answering these two questions. The North African country was ranked 73rd out of 180 countries in the Corruption Perceptions Index 2018, according to the new report of Transparency International.³

Regardless of this, Tunisian public opinion believes that the anti-corruption laws set by the government failed to achieve the expected results, despite the financial support received by the National Anti-Corruption Authority.⁴

This failure translates into ongoing corrupt acts that directly violate human rights. In the public services sector, for example, the practice of “Wasta”, (meaning connections) has contributed to a wide network of nepotism and cronyism. Many civil servants do not have the right qualifications for their jobs. Therefore, Tunisians who are actually qualified for a public service job become victims and their right to work (Article 23 UDHR⁵) becomes threatened.

¹ Foreword by Kofi Annan in the UN Convention Against Corruption
https://www.unodc.org/documents/brussels/UN_Convention_Against_Corruption.pdf

² Human Rights Council, “The role of good governance in the promotion and protection of human rights” of 27 March 2008, paragraph 4 http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/e/hrc/resolutions/a_hrc_res_7_11.pdf

³ Transparency International Organization on Tunisia 2018 <https://www.transparency.org/country/TUN>

⁴ AllAfrica Report «Tunisia Rises One Place in Corruption Perceptions Index »
<https://allafrica.com/stories/201901290862.html>

⁵ Check Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. United Nations, United Nations,
www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/.



Also, the healthcare system has always been home for corruption in Tunisia; false prescriptions, illicit drugs, and faults in public procurement all endanger healthcare the country⁶. This directly affects the right of citizens to the highest attainable standard of health (Article 12 ICESCR⁷). In the sector of civil society, the government, at times, has put associations through unnecessary bureaucratic registration procedures.⁸ This challenges the right of freedom of association and their right to take collective actions to achieve their goals (Article 22 ICCPR⁹).

In addition, some argue that, although bribery is considered a “victimless crime” (or its victim is the general public), sometimes the briber, who often even takes the initiative, can be considered as a victim in Tunisia. In many fields (education, judiciary, police...), the option of the illegal quid pro quo and the agreement to it by bribers is mostly a result of desperate situations. This happens when the briber tries to access their basic national rights but gets rejected by the authority. Therefore, they become a victim of the corrupt system in which they are not “free” but rather coerced.

It is evident that in Tunisia, corruption can violate recognized human rights that are codified by the UN human rights covenants. These rights are primarily social and are often affected by the petty corruption systems that are present today. However, it is important to mention the progress Tunisia has made in combating corruption, enhancing democracy, and establishing a good governance system, especially after the 2018 Municipal elections. It is also equally important to recognize the efforts the Tunisian civil society has done after the 2011 revolution, naming organizations such as IWatch Organization and Al Bawsala.

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⁶ Middle East Eye: “‘Letting Go of Every Principle’: Tunisia’s Democratic Gains Under Threat”, 23 July 2017 <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/letting-go-every-principle-tunisia-democratic-gains-under-threat>

⁷ Check Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>

⁸ The GAN Business Anti-Corruption Portal, Tunisia Corruption Report <https://www.business-anti-corruption.com/country-profiles/tunisia/>

⁹ Check Article 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx.



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