



# ARAB DISPATCH

ISSUE 24<sup>th</sup>  
November 30<sup>th</sup> – December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021

## NORTH AFRICA #Algeria

### Algeria's FNL survives in local elections

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of November, Algerians voted for municipal and provincial councils.

The local assemblies elect two-thirds of the members of the national parliament's upper house. The other members are appointed directly by the president.

Unsurprisingly, preliminary results give Algeria's National Liberation Front as the winner of the local elections.

The FNL, whose origins date back to the independence war from France, in 1962, and that was for decades the only authorised party, won 5.978 seats nationwide followed by its traditional ally the Democratic National Rally (RND)

with 4.584. Independents won 4.430 seats.

The party won the first place by obtaining the majority in 696 municipalities.

Also, in the elections of the state councils, the National Liberation Front party won the majority, obtaining 471 seats.

However, despite the several campaigns inviting citizens to vote and despite Tebboune's televised invitation to vote for municipal and provincial councils the results showed a low turnout highlighting, once again, Algerians' persistent mistrust in the current

government and in the country's institutions.

The latest local elections represented another test for President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, elected in 2019 after peaceful demonstrations, led mostly by the Hirak pro-democracy movement and supported by the army, had overthrown Abdelaziz Bouteflika after 20 years of rule.

Tebboune's election to the presidency has been indeed widely boycotted by the citizens. Last June the participation to the parliamentary elections hit also a record low turnout with only 23% of voter participation.

As a matter of fact, local elections saw this time around a slight improvement with 36,6% turnout for local elections and 34,8% for regional polls but a widespread frustration remains.

The long-ruling party remains dominant in the political scene, while the Socialist Forces Front (FFS), Hirak's political party, failed to emerge.

On the other hand, the support for Islamist party such as El Bina and the

Movement of Society for Peace (MSP) diminished significantly.

According to Redouane Boudjemaa, a journalism professor at University of Algiers, the election has been widely boycotted because Algerians perceived the vote as a manoeuvre by the government "to clean up the façade of local councils by changing their members to benefit the ruling class". The ruling government in several occasions called for a change to turn the page on the two-decade rule of former President Bouteflika however, without really engaging other political forces.

The voting was supposed to be the final step in the political renewal promoted by Tebboune upon elections. On the contrary, the ruling party remains, highlighting once again that the political changes announced in 2019 have been only cosmetic and have de facto reinforced the ruling class.



Source: Anadolu Agency

#### To know more:

- *Al Jazeera*, Algerians vote in local polls to seal post-Bouteflika “change”, 27/11/21, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/27/algerians-vote-in-local-polls-to-seal-post-bouteflika-change>
- *Arab News*, Algeria’s FLN narrowly wins local polls, 30/11/21, available at: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1978561/middle-east>
- *Middle East Monitor*, Former ruling party, the National Liberation Front has won, overall, in local elections, 01/12/21, available at: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20211201-algeria-former-ruling-party-the-national-liberation-front-has-won-overall-in-local-elections/>
- *AP News*, Algeria’s top parties keep power in local elections, 01/12/21, available at: <https://apnews.com/article/business-religion-elections-local-elections-algiers-fbadcf120f1350222c8b0f752b11c1f8>

### The UN celebrates the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people

On the 29<sup>th</sup> of November, during the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people the Palestinian activist, Mohammed El-Kurd gave quite stirring speech to the UN General Assembly, condemning the on-going Palestinian settlement expansion plan and the international community inaction.

Mohammed El-Kurd is an activist and writer born in Sheikh Jarrah, one of the neighbourhoods in the occupied East Jerusalem that are at risk of forced eviction by Israel's settlement associations.

After the Nakba (the Catastrophe of 1948) that left hundreds of thousands of Palestinians displaced, in 1956, 28 Palestinian families were allowed to settle in Sheikh Jarrah under an agreement between Jordan and the UN Relief and works Agency for Palestinians Refugees (UNRWA).

Last January the Jerusalem District Court ruled that some of the families, living for generations in Sheikh Jarrah, must evacuate their homes and leave their properties to Israeli persons as part of Israel's annexation plan.

The announcement led to popular unrests that spread quickly to al-Aqsa mosque and triggered a 11-day confrontation between the Jewish state and Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip.

Documenting the forced eviction and threats of displacement, Mohammed El-Kurd and his sister Muna, shared videos on social media. Videos of Palestinians living under occupation went viral rising worldwide awareness. The two siblings became the voices of this forced eviction.

During the [speech](#) Mohammed El-Kurd condemned what he called the "Israeli settler-colonial regime" for its

illegal occupation and for perpetuating an “apartheid” against Palestinians.

The speech coincided with the 74<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN’s partition plan that finally led to the establishment of Israel (UNGA Resolution 181 II).

The Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Hissein Brahim Taha, reiterated harshly the OIC’s rejection and condemnation of all illegal Israeli occupation’s measures and practices to impose new realities on the ground.

As-Sharq al-Awsat reports that the Israeli ambassador to the United Nations, Gilad Erdan, criticised the UN for commemorating the voting anniversary of the resolution with an event held in solidarity with the Palestinians and described as “outrageous” the General Assembly support for the Palestinian “right of return”.

As reported by the Times of Israel, he further accused the UN General Assembly of trying to erase the

Jewish history by advancing and amplifying the Palestinian narrative and by silencing the tragic stories of Jewish refugees expelled from Arab countries and from Iran.

In response to the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people, Israel’s mission to the UN launched a campaign together with the World Jewish Congress: “Don’t erase Jewish history”.

Abdullah Shahid, President of the UN General Assembly, said that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is on the global agenda. He further highlighted that Palestinians, uprooted since 1948, “are losing hope of returning to their homes especially as illegal settlements proliferate”. He then addressed also the dire situation in the Gaza strip.

While normalising relations, all GCC countries had previously expressed their firm position towards Palestine’s right to have its own free state, with 1967 borders and East Jerusalem as its capital.



Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian Authority President stated that the “Palestinians will not tolerate the Israeli occupation forever”. Some French-speaking Lebanese media, while underlining the success of the latest Palestinian media campaign,

noted that these were of short duration, scarcely influential on politics and leading to a folklorisation of the Palestinian issue, neutralising the realities on the ground.



Source: *The New Arab*

#### To know more:

- *Al Jazeera*, What is happening in occupied East Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah, 01/05/21, available at: [https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/1/what-is-happening-in-](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/1/what-is-happening-in-occupied-east-jerusalems-sheikh-jarrah)

[occupied-east-jerusalems-sheikh-jarrah](#)

- *Arab News*, UN marks International Day of Solidarity with Palestinian people, 29/11/21, available at:

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1977766/world>

- *Middle East Monitor*, Mohammed El-Kurd addresses UN on anniversary of Palestine partition, 30/11/21, available at: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20211130-mohammed-el-kurd-addresses-un-on-anniversary-of-palestine-partition/>
- *The New Arab*, Mohammed El-Kurd gives scathing Palestine speech at UN, 30/11/21, available at: <https://nordot.app/838397654447013888?fr=operanews>
- *The Times of Israel*, Israel protests as UN marks partition plan with Palestinian solidarity even, 30/11/21, available at:

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-protests-as-un-marks-partition-plan-with-palestinian-solidarity-event/>

- *Ashark al-Awsat*, Israel Protests UN Commemoration of Pasrtition Plan, 05/12/21, available at: <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/3342621/israel-protests-un-commemoration-partition-plan>

## GULF #Bahrain

### A catholic cathedral to celebrate Gulf's tolerance towards religions

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of November Bahrain announced the inauguration of the largest catholic cathedral ever built in the Gulf region.

Our Lady of Arabia will be inaugurated by the king, Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa on the 9<sup>th</sup> of December

and consecrated, the day after, by the prefect of the Vatican Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle.

The inauguration of the cathedral follows the official invitation of the

Pope presented on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November by the King.

The architectural project started in 2013, when King Hamad al-Khalifa donated a plot of land to the country's large Catholic community (around 80.000 worshippers).

One year later, during a meeting with Pope Francis, the King officially presented an architectural model of the Cathedral to be built as a symbol Bahrain's commitment to religions coexistence and tolerance.

The shape of the cathedral recalls the "tent of meeting" set up by the prophet Moses as early worship place, while the octagonal dome has been designed following the existing architecture of many ancient churches, such as the Basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna (Italy).

Additionally, the Vatican and Bahrain have strong ties since Catholic leaders decided to move the seat of the Church's authority in the Arabian Peninsula, known as the Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Arabia, from Kuwait to Bahrain.

However, despite the wide enthusiasm that followed the announcement of the construction of the largest catholic cathedral in the Gulf region, intended to be a symbol of tolerance, the project sparked a lot of criticism, with many questioning the kingdom's real openness towards religion and tolerance towards the marginalized Shia majority living in Bahrain.

The Church complex that was supposed to show the rest of the world the kingdom's tradition of religious tolerance in a very conservative Muslim region, where churches are very few and usually limited to a simple room, raised concerns among hard-line Sunni circles and, in 2016 more than 70 clerics signed a petition to halt the construction, claiming that there are no justifications to build further churches and that the Shariah prohibits to build churches in the Arabian Peninsula, the birthplace of Islam. Nonetheless the country already hosts the Sacred Heart Church build in the capital, Manama,



in 1939, which represents the oldest church in the Gulf.

Building churches in the Arabian Peninsula and, most significantly, the involvement of Muslims in the construction of a Church is a very controversial topic with clerics and jurists still debating over the issue and giving fatwas on whether it is forbidden for Muslims to build a Church or not.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of January, 2020, the Egyptian Grand Mufti, Shawky Allam, issued a Fatwa allowing Muslims to build and take part in the constructions of a church. After many prominent clerics and jurists had previously forbidden Muslims to build churches, the forementioned fatwa sparked angry reactions among the most conservative circles, with activists recalling previous Salafists' fatwas. Similarly in 2009 a fatwa issued by Mohammed Sayed Tantawi, former Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, stating that Muslims are allowed to participate in building churches, caused many controversies.

Instead of being the symbol of religions coexistence and tolerance the church complex turned quickly into another point of tension in a country already pulled apart by sectarianism and intra-Islamic conflicts, notably the Sunni-Shia rivalry.

In this regards Katja Niethammer, Professor of Islamic studies at the University of Hamburg stated that the King's decision to erect a new church in the small kingdom was indeed a political and mediatic manoeuvre rather than a sign of religious tolerance.

During the 2011 uprising, that saw the country's Shiite majority calling for more democracy and political inclusion, the army loyal to the Sunni royal family, brutally repressed the protests, raising international concerns and condemnations. After the suppression of the revolts at the sadly famous Pearl Roundabout, the kingdom was in extreme need of a good media exposure in the west.

On the other hand, it is true that Bahrain's constitution protects non-Muslims and respects their freedom

of worship allowing them to display symbols of their faith.



Source: Gulf News

To know more:

- *Arab News*, Bahrain Catholic cathedral to be consecrated on Dec.10, 30/11/21, available at: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1978341/middle-east>
- *Al Monitor*, Grand Mufti of Egypt says OK for Muslims to build churches, 10/02/20, available at: <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/02/egypt-fatwa-muslims-build-churches-controversy.html>
- *Deutsche Welle*, Vatican plans new cathedral in Bahrain, 13/09/12, available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/vatican-plans-new-cathedral-in-bahrain/a-16234613>
- *Arab News*, Bahrain's church project cements Gulf region's reputation for religious tolerance,

23/12/20, available at:  
<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1782016/middle-east>

## **ARAB INSIGHT**

### **#DAESH**

### **First ever conviction for DAESH genocide against Yazidi**

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of November a court in Frankfurt (Germany) issued a life sentence against an Iraqi member of DAESH for committing genocide against the Yazidi community, delivering the first ever conviction for genocide in the world against a DAESH fighter.

As reported by [As-Sharq al-Awsat](#) the genocide trial involved Taha Al-Jumailly, a former DAESH fighter, and his wife for “purchasing” a Yazidi woman and her five-year-old daughter. The couple enslaved them both in Fallujah (Iraq) in 2015.

After being repeatedly abused, the little girl was chained outside the house and died of thirst. The court found Taha Al-Jumailly and his wife guilty of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

According to [Al-Hurrah](#), during the trial, the German Court described the crimes perpetrated by the Caliphate against the religious ethnic minority as a genocide, paving the way for an international recognition of the crimes inflicted by DAESH fighters against humanity and that targeted the Yazidi community.

The Yazidis are a Kurdish-speaking ethno-religious minority with a strong peculiar religious identity, living mainly in northern Iraq, in Nineveh province and North-eastern Iraqi Kurdistan. Worldwide the Yazidi population is estimated to be around 500.000 and most of them live in Northern Iraq.



*Source: Al Jazeera*

Because of their misunderstood mystical religion, labelled as Satanism by extremists, they witnessed persecution within the Muslim community multiple times in history.

The root cause of the Yazidi persecution throughout the centuries is their theology. According to Yazidism, a religion born in Mesopotamia more than 4.000 years ago, rooted in Zoroastrianism and blended in elements of Islam and Christianity, God controls the entire world through seven angels, among them Malak Tawous, the only angel that disobeyed to God's orders and that, according to the Abrahamic story, gave the origins to Satan.

For worshipping the disobedient angel, that all the monotheistic religions labelled as Satan, the Yazidi have been always wrongly accused of devil worship.

However, in the Yazidi tradition God forgives disobedience therefore, the angel was elevated to the head of angelic order. This specific misunderstanding and

the fact that they are not recognised neither as Arabs nor Kurds led to multiple attempts of ethnic cleansing against them.

After being persecuted by Saddam Hussein, the Yazidi welcomed the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and re-established themselves as a religious community in Northern Iraq. The ethno-religious minority avoided any kind of fighting with the Sunni community and the territory was widely recognised as a Yazidi area.

In 2007 a suicide bombing ordered by Al-Qaeda killed 500 Yazidis in Sinjar and in 2014 the violence against Yazidi rose again and reached its peak when the self-proclaimed Islamic State took control of northern Iraq and launched a massive persecution against religious and ethnic minorities, Yazidis, Shabaks and Christians.

Following the conquest of the Sinjar district, DAESH inflicted tremendous atrocities against the Yazidis.

Not recognised as Muslims and neither protected by the Quran, the Yazidi were forced to convert to Islam. Those who did not convert were killed and thrown into mass graves while women and children were enslaved and sold multiple times among the members of the caliphate (in Islam slavery is seen as a source of injustice and the Quran, revealed when slavery was a common reality, promotes the emancipation of slaves and discourages enslavement).

Systematic rape of Yazidi women was a tool of ethnic cleansing. Yazidi have a male-dominated culture where relationship with non-Yazidi is strictly prohibited and lead to the exclusion from the community. Raping their women and letting them giving birth to non-Yazidi children became the main tool to isolate them and thus to eradicate the Yazidi community. By targeting women and what they represent in the Yazidi community, DAESH attempted to erase their identity by turning them into Muslim wives and making them giving birth to Muslim children.





*Source: Middle East Monitor*

As reported by [Al-Hurrah](#), the Directorate of Yazidi Affairs of the Ministry of Endowment and Religious affairs of the Kurdistan Regional Government estimated that between 2014 and 2017 about 1.280 Yazidis were brutally killed and more than 2.300 children became orphans. It is also estimated that more than 6.400 Yazidi women were kidnapped, among them 3.400 survived. In 2020 many Yazidi women and children were freed and managed to reunite with their families. Many others are still missing. Sadly, according to the Yazidi Affairs Directorate, many Yazidi women abandoned their children in Syria in order to be accepted again within the community.

Even though the atrocities perpetuated by the Islamic State against the Yazidis are not officially recognised as a genocide, the conviction of genocide issued by a court in Germany, that hosts a significant number of Yazidis, is an important step forward and many other international courts might follow.

According to the Yazidi member of the Iraqi parliament, [Khaleda Khalil](#), this sentence is the evidence of the recognition of the crime of genocide perpetuated



by DAESH against the Yazidi community. According to Khaleda Khalil, Iraq is going through very turbulent times and the judiciary system is unable to conduct trials and to give justice to all the families that were victims of the genocide. She further praised the Kurdistan Regional Government for its great efforts and commitment in prosecuting DAESH fighters, responsible of tremendous atrocities against Yazidis.

[Issa Saado](#), an Iraqi Yazidi activist currently living in Germany, stated to Al-Hurrah that now that Germany, a country with a significant political weight in the European Union delivered the first world's conviction for genocide, many countries will follow and this is the result of the important efforts made by many Yazidi activists living in Germany - among them the Nobel Peace Prize Nadia Murad - committed to pursue and to legally condemn DAESH members for inflicting atrocities against ethnic minorities in particular the Yazidi. She added that, while she welcomed the German court's verdict, she was highly disappointed for her country's insufficient effort in prosecuting ISIS members and giving justice to hundreds of Yazidi families.

[Nadia Murad](#), who escaped from ISIS's captivity and survived the atrocities of the Islamic State, hailed the court's decision, and stated that this represents a victory for the survivors of the genocide and the entire Yazidi community.

According to [Christian Ritscher](#), Special Adviser and Head of the United Nations Investigative Team to promote accountability for crimes committed by DAESH, the verdict delivered by the German court represents an "historic moment" and an opportunity to turn these "exceptions" into norms. He added that in collaboration with the Iraqi authorities and the Kurdistan Regional Government further steps can be achieved to provide justice for those who are victims of the atrocities inflicted by DAESH.

Maria Bagnara

*As a general disclaimer, the articles do not necessarily reflect the view of the NATO Defense College Foundation or any institution of or associated with NATO.*