

Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet **Wins 2015 Nobel Peace Prize**

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A collective of civil society groups in Tunisia was awarded the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize for promoting democracy after the nation's Arab Spring uprising, work that helped prevent a bloody conflict similar to those that followed revolts elsewhere in the region.

The Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet "established an alternative, peaceful political process at a time when the country was on the brink of civil war," Nobel Committee Chairman Kaci Kullmann Five said in Oslo on Friday. It was "instrumental in enabling Tunisia, in the space of a few years, to establish a constitutional system of government guaranteeing fundamental rights for the entire population, irrespective of gender, political conviction or religious belief."

The Quartet consists of the Tunisian General Labour Union, the Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts, the Tunisian Human Rights League and the Tunisian Order of Lawyers. It was formed in 2013 when the country's post-revolutionary transformation came to a grinding halt amid unrest that followed the assassinations of opposition politicians Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi, and controversy over the drafting of a new constitution.

Mass demonstrations against the rule of long-standing Tunisian autocrat Zine El Abidine Ben Ali at the end of 2010 quickly spread across North Africa and the Middle East, touching off the

2011 Arab Spring. Tunisia has escaped much of the violence that has since engulfed neighboring nations such as Libya and Egypt, and has seen a “democratic transition based on a vibrant civil society with demands for respect for basic human rights,” the Norwegian committee said.

‘Prize for All’

“The Arab region is on fire, and this puts Tunisia in a much deserved spotlight,” said Kristina Kausch, the head of the Middle East Program at Madrid-based think-tank FRIDE.

“Symbolically, it is a prize for all of Tunisian civil society. And they deserve it.”

Tunisia’s trade unions have mediating experience stretching back decades that was tested during the summer of 2013, when the Quartet was formed to address political deadlock between Islamists and secularists. They secured a deal after about three months of talks that resulted in the resignation of the Islamist-led administration and its replacement by a government of technocrats. A new constitution, heralded as one of the most progressive in the region, was later adopted and presidential elections held.

Two major terrorist attacks by Islamic State this year, on a tourist resort in Sousse and the Bardo Museum in Tunis, along with the attempted assassination of a lawmaker this week underline the threats that success faces.

‘Put Down Arms’

“The prize came at the right time because our country is still threatened by different security challenges,” Tunisian General Labour Union Secretary General Houcine Abassi was quoted by local Radio Mosaique FM as saying. He described it as a message to the region to “to put down arms and sit and talk at the negotiating table.”

Annual prizes for achievements in physics, chemistry, medicine, peace and literature were established in the will of Alfred Nobel, the Swedish inventor of dynamite who died in 1896, and the first prizes were handed out in 1901. A prize for economics was established in 1968 by Sweden's Riksbank. All except the peace prize are awarded in Stockholm, and this year's awards come with 8 million kronor (\$970,000) of prize money.

Past laureates include U.S. President Barack Obama in 2009 and Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo in 2010. Last year, the prize was awarded to India's Kailash Satyarthi and Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani schoolgirl who was shot by the Taliban, for their advocacy of education rights for children.