

How does the April 6 Youth Movement view the positions of the various parties and powers regarding whether to participate in or boycott the parliamentary elections?

**We expressed our opinion a while ago regarding the question of participation and we supported the decision to boycott shame elections provided that it is a total boycott that includes all, and not just some, of the opposition forces. Participation, even if it is only partial, will give legitimacy to the elections and weaken the boycott weapon that could deprive the National Democratic Party (NDP) of its legitimacy and undermine the legitimacy of the elections themselves. Accordingly, we called for a complete boycott that includes all political powers and for a post-election plan B. Most of the opposition parties declared their boycott of the elections, but unfortunately and as usual there were some opposition powers such as the Muslim Brotherhood and the Wafd that announced their participations in the elections, which undermined the effectiveness of the boycott as a political weapon.**

Your movement called for a boycott by everybody. Why?

**Obviously, the idea of “total boycott of the elections” is to frustrate the NDP and undermine the elections’ legitimacy, while partial participation gives the elections some degree of legitimacy. Therefore, we called for a total boycott from all parties and for a positive boycott involving the supervision of elections and the documentation of fraud and irregularities. We also called and are trying to convince the other political powers not to endorse the results of falsified elections, to form a parallel People’s Assembly, to be present in all electoral districts as well as to inform people about the role of the People’s Assembly in legislation.**

How do you define your current role in Egypt? Sometimes you advocate public protests, while at other times you call attention to human rights cases and urge the opposition to boycott elections. How do you see your role and what is the nature of the political reforms you are calling for?

**Being the first youth movement in Egypt to use internet-based modes of communication like Facebook and Twitter, we aim to promote democracy by encouraging public involvement in the political process. We encourage people to take an interest in political decision-making and issues such as the separation of powers. By assessing the program and performance of the governing party, citizens can hold their government accountable. Moreover, we call for social justice and an economic system where power and wealth are not intermingled, as is the case currently. This is the form of the state we want, and democratic development is our ultimate objective.**

**Our role consists of inspiring and motivating the public. We are not a political party and we don’t have any candidates running in the People’s Assembly election. However, we are young people with an abundance of energy and awareness and self-discipline. We try to learn from other examples of political change and from the experiences of youth in other countries. We also support other political forces and symbols such as Mohammed ElBaradei and the National Association for change. We help any project or idea that supports change. In addition, we try to push and motivate youth and elite towards a comprehensive social project in which every individual will play a role. We will join with members of the elite, opposition parties, human rights organizations and youth in formulating this project. We are also working to change the mentality of a younger generation that was raised in an environment of political passivity. We are urging these youth to participate in political life and public affairs.**

What are the guarantees that your movement has demanded in order to ensure the impartiality and transparency of the elections?

**Up to this moment, there is widespread agreement about the substance of the guarantees and they have been demanded by more than one party in past years. We are talking about the need**

for total judicial supervision of the ballot boxes and the requirement that the supervising judicial commission be truly impartial and not composed of public officials appointed by the president. The supervising judicial commission must guarantee comprehensive oversight of all phases of the electoral process starting with the voting schedule and ending with the counting of ballots. Another requirement is the presence of international monitoring, such as occurs in elections all over the world. Egyptians themselves have supervised elections in America, African countries and many other states. We also demand that voters be allowed to register on the basis of their national ID numbers and not by way of the voting cards which are more vulnerable to manipulation by the NDP. We also assert the right of Egyptians living abroad to vote.

We want free and impartial elections where every candidate may express his point of view and ideas with freedom, not just those who belong to the NDP. We call for civil society to play a role in the supervision of the electoral process. These are the minimum standards that must be met in order to ensure the impartiality of the elections. However, the implementation of these principles would inevitably lead to the removal of the governing party from the power, and therefore the regime will persist in its efforts to falsify and manipulate election results.

Does the movement have a presence outside of cities and the youth constituency?

Our target audience is youth, and if we supported in certain moments some labor cases it was in order to link labor and social causes with political ones. Accordingly, we dealt sometimes with groups such as teachers and workers in order to teach them about the necessity of changing the Constitution. In addition to political reforms, these are the conditions that govern the work of the organizations or institutions in which they work. But our essential target constituency remains the youth who are present in universities, clubs, internet cafés and all places where young people congregate. This is the group of people to whom we can transmit our ideas most easily, through modes of communication with which they are very familiar. These are people who possess a strong capacity for action, creativity and innovation. They don't have the fear of the old generation that is concerned with protecting itself from state repression.

We are present in Cairo and about ten other districts, in some villages and centers outside the capital. There are new movements emerging every day that are related to the April 6 Youth. We are noticing a sort of organizational dispersion, in which self-contained groups are forming independently while maintaining an informal affiliation with the April 6 Youth.

You were a pioneer in using communications technology such as Facebook for political purposes. What is your assessment of the actual presence of the movement in Egyptian society?

No one can deny the benefits of using such means and their effect on political activity Egypt. These new modes of communication are known as alternative media, but their impact remains limited to internet users only. Therefore, we still need to find new ways of reaching people in the street. We have a considerable influence on Egyptian and foreign media as well as the capacity to disseminate information rapidly using the internet, and through some independent media sources that publish our news continuously. But we need to reach other groups of people who do not use the internet or Twitter or Facebook, including members of the old generation as well as many young people. We need to interact directly with these individuals in clubs, universities and neighborhoods. It is important to note that reaching these people is relatively expensive in comparison to the low cost of using the internet, where we can write articles and publish blogs and videos that rapidly influence the thinking of many young people and motivate them to participate in our movement. Reaching out to populations that do not use the internet requires going directly to the streets, which is expensive and could lead to the arrest or torture of some of our members. However, we are trying hard to develop innovative strategies in accordance with the

**principles of non-violent change.**

Have you tried to use these methods to transmit your message beyond Egypt?

**There is of course contact between us and between many youth movements and young activist as well as civil society organizations around the world, and we benefited a lot from studying the experiences of other youth movements. We are spreading our ideas, and many young people sympathize with us.**

Have you been confronted by the authorities, and how?

**Of course we are engaged in a continuous confrontation, whether it takes the form of harassment by the security services or frequent legal prosecution. With the beginning of the new academic year, we had many groups within the Egyptian universities. At present, we some of our student members are still being detained. Many of them were subject to interrogations on campus or in police stations, and were thus deprived of the opportunity to take their exams. In general, activism on campus is confronted with violence. Many of our members have been arbitrarily fired from their jobs as a result of directives from the security services.**

Have you experienced any restrictions on the technologies used by the movement, such as the blocking of Facebook pages, for example?

**At first, the authorities did not interfere with these means of communication, but now we are faced with the regime's persistent efforts to penetrate and control our websites. For example, on April 6, 2010, our movement was attempting to coordinate a mass protest using SMS messages sent via the internet. But the security forces blocked the web site on that day, and prevented us from sending SMS messages to the group. Sometimes, our Facebook pages are hacked and we are continuously trying to respond to this.**

Will you conduct monitoring operations during the elections, and how?

**We are seeking to coordinate with human rights centers that have more experience in the area of electoral monitoring. We have a large number of young people ready to participate in monitoring activities and we are trying to coordinate with other organizations.**

How would you describe the level of cooperation between the April 6 Youth Movement and the National Association for Change? And what direction do you expect the opposition to take following the campaign to gather signatures for the NAC's petition?

**As a youth coalition, the April 6 movement includes many youth movements and groups that are considered part of the National Association for Change. Since the beginning, we have been preparing web sites to gather electronic signatures via the internet, as well as the signatures of young people in universities and popular neighborhoods. We participated in the signature campaign through the internet as well as in the streets and on university campuses. We are convinced by the principles underlying the National Association for Change and its petition and we view this movement as the precursor to democratic change.**

**As for the post-petition phase, we always viewed the campaign as a means rather than a goal in and of itself. Our goal is not simply to collect signatures but to leverage these signatures as an instrument for raising political awareness in the street. We are talking with people in the streets about the need for constitutional amendments pertaining to candidates for the presidency, cancellation of the emergency law, the conducting of free and impartial elections, and electoral monitoring. We strive to connect these demands to the issues that Egyptians care about, such as**

education and healthcare. We are trying to make people understand the relevance of these reforms to their everyday concerns. We think we achieved a great success at this level, since we hold daily discussions in the streets where volunteers help to spread our ideas by gathering signatures. It is crucial that after collecting the signatures we invite all those who signed the petition for change to participate in a major demonstration when the time is right. It is also important to have mobilized a large group that is prepared to take to the streets and participate in acts of civil disobedience or acts of protest and resistance. The way to achieve this is through continuous interaction between the advocates of change and the citizens who responded to their call and signed the petition.