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OPEMAM Analysis

INTERVIEW:

MOROCCO/ Legislative elections

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Irene Fernández Molina, researcher and member of the OPEMAM mission to Morocco interviewed by Rafael Bustos

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A team of three people from OPEMAM¹ covered the last legislative elections in Morocco, which took place on November the 25th. OPEMAM's scientific coordinator Rafael Bustos, interviewed Irene Fernández Molina, who was one of the researchers on the team. This is a summary of that interview with Irene, who will write the Election Report that will be published on our site in the following weeks.

Interview:

OPEMAM: What were the innovations in these November the 25th legislative elections and why were they important?

IMF: The innovations stem from the political context. The elections are important because these were the first to take place after the Constitutional reform. The regime has presented these elections as "foundational", however as some critics pointed out, Moroccan elections are usually presented this way. The main innovation is that, according to the new Constitution, the king is forced to appoint as the head of the government a representative of the political force with the highest number of votes.

The National Council for Human Rights was in charge of organizing the national and international observation - not in itself an innovation. It is still the Ministry of Interior that is in charge of organizing the electoral process. However, international observation increased with respect to 2007 (when only the National Democratic Institute took part), with the presence of the NDI, of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly, of a team from the European Union Delegation in Morocco (not from the Commission), of an Arab observers network and other small institutions such as OPEMAM Electoral Watch. There was not a team of observers from the European Union, as happened in Tunisia.

OPEMAM: The "dwindling census" phenomenon - as described by Bernabé López García - has gotten worse again. What is its effect on the results and on their credibility?

IFM: The effect of the lack of updating the electoral census is that the participation has artificially increased because there are fewer people registered. Even though the number of voters has been more or less the same than in 2007, around 6 million, the participation rate is 8 points higher (45% compared to 37%), because the number of people registered is lower. We need to remember that electoral registration in Morocco is voluntary and a lot of young people decide not to register. Participation is the fundamental problem of the elections, and it makes the process less believable. There is no official statistics about Moroccan citizens of legal voting age, but it is estimated they are between 21-22 million, which means that at least 8 million possible voters have been left off the official census (13 million) - a very significant proportion.

¹ The three members of OPEMAM, Bernabé López García, Raquel Ojeda García and Irene Fernández Molina, were accompanied by Virginia González González, Juana Moreno Nieto, Manuel Lorenzo Villar and Jokin Azpiroz Echeolenea.

OPEMAM: You were in Morocco from the 21st. Did you notice any of the irregularities that were reported during the campaign, such as the use of mosques for campaigning etc.?

IFM: Our mission was limited in its capacities and we could not directly confirm nor deny these accusations. It is true that the press published some information reporting vote-buying, but these accusations were too general and ambiguous to be taken as proved facts. The pressure towards the 20-F movement has been more significant and visible. More than a hundred people were arrested in the whole country. They were detained for the legally established time and there was no violation of the law. Nevertheless the pressure was evident.

OPEMAM: Regarding the double national list system (youths and women), and the fact that the youth lists only contained men - do you think on the subject of female representation there is progress or not?

IFM: This system is a sort of trap because the national list of 60 women ensures 60 women in the House of Representatives (lower chamber), but in the young people's list (30) as well as in the lists represented locally (305 seats) there are practically only men². It is not written anywhere that women cannot run on the young people's list, but in practice women are left off those lists because they have one of their own. This mechanism, even though it normalizes the female presence in parliament, has a contrary effect and it makes it difficult for female representation to advance.

OPEMAM: Did the call for an electoral boycott by the 20-F movement have an important effect besides the expected rate of abstention?

IFM: It is difficult to answer that question. As we said before, the abstention rate was similar to the one in the legislative elections of the year 2007. The actions made by the 20-F movement, with almost daily demonstrations before the elections, may have had an effect on the abstention rate but it is really difficult to quantify. Moreover the Islamic movement *Al-Adl wa al-Ihsan* (Justice and Spiritually) did join the boycott; but they joined the 20-F movement's demonstrations only on some days. They were easy to recognize because they were separated by sex and they walked in file, very disciplined.

OPEMAM: From what you and the OPEMAM team could observe, how was election day?

IFM: In general it was peaceful and without important irregularities. The influx of people was low except for certain hours, such as after lunch and before closing time. At these times women assembled and there were arguments and struggles in some polling stations. It is true that there were significant differences between the polling stations we observed. Some were very well organized and voting was quick, whereas in others (usually the ones situated in traditional neighborhoods) there were a lot of people who did not know where

² Aside from the national list, female candidacies consisted of 484 candidates in the local constituencies (9% of the total) and only 57 candidates as head of local lists (3.75%)

they had to vote. In the former, somebody with a computer was able to answer peoples' questions, in the latter there was nobody to help those citizens who didn't have their voting cards. The counting we observed was correct and indicative of the importance of the PJD party in Salé, where the party's candidate, Abdelillah Benkirane, is also the party's Secretary-General.

OPEMAM: The PJD won these elections and its secretary general, Abdelillah Benkirane will be prime minister. Which parties do you think will give him the support necessary to govern?

IFM: The PJD is mainly negotiating with parties from "Koutla dimuqratiyya" (Istiqlal, in second position in these elections; the USFP and PPS). It dismisses the idea of creating a government or receiving support from the PAM party, (Party of Authenticity and Modernity) headed by Fouad Ali Himma. It can also count on the MP (Popular Movement), but does not need it because with the support of the Koutla (and in fact, only with Istiqlal and the USFP) they already have an absolute majority. Inside the USFP party there is a strong debate taking place about whether to join the new government or not. The group headed by Bouabid is against this idea and would rather stay in the opposition. We will have to wait and see, but the most likely idea is a government between the PJD and the parties of the Koutla, despite the particularities and contradictions that it can bring.

OPEMAM: Will the King keep some of the Sovereignty Ministries, besides Religious Affairs? There has been a lot of speculation about Defense and Foreign Affairs. What do you think?

IFM: The situation is confusing and there are no written rules on this matter. The new Constitution is not clear about it. Before, the Constitution did not say anything about these "Sovereignty Ministries" either and yet they existed. I think that the King will keep a direct control on the Ministries of Interior and Foreign Affairs, as well as on Religious Affairs.