

## “Young people all over the world need to get political”

Interview with Hajer Sharief

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### What was your motivation to co-found the organisation “Together We Build It”?

I would definitely say the first motivation or the main aspiration was more or less a breaking point. During the revolution in 2011, I was studying medicine and I was on my journey to become a doctor. When the war started, I volunteered at Tripolis Hospital. And at that time I thought that the revolution and basically a change in our leadership could happen fast. I thought of it in a very practical way: You just get rid of the dictatorship and its regime and that is it. But while I

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was working at the hospital, I realised that the work or journey for change in Libya had just started. And it was a wake-up call for me to see that the society, in particular the Libyan society, would need to undertake a process of reconciliation and rehabilitation from all the violence that the people went through. Therefore, my colleagues and

I co-founded the “Together We Build It” organisation. As you can assume from its name, we work and call for all actors in Libya and everyone to contribute to rebuilding the society and bringing peace back to the country.

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### How does your work look like in practice?

The practical work includes so many aspects of promoting peace in Libya: Empowering women’s political participation, women’s economic empowerment, also youth political participation and youth participation in peacebuilding. It is about building up capacity of women and youth, empowering and encouraging local

communities to participate and play an active role in peacebuilding. We also create platforms to connect local communities with national decision makers.

This process is bottom-up but also top-down. We help creating these channels where local communities can deliver their messages, thoughts and also feelings about what is going on in the country to our national decision makers.

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### How do you cope with the political surrounding in Libya?

The political situation can indeed really complicate our work. But I must also admit that despite that there are always different political actors that can exist in one city, the different political actors are usually willing to listen. As an organisation, we remain politically neutral though. We call for a dialogue, we call for debate, and we have always been inclusive in our work. We want to involve all actors in the community in Libya, whether it is state actors, non-state actors, including civil society and local communities. We basically work with all different groups and call for peace and dialogue.

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### In what way should young people in other countries make their voices heard?

I would say the first thing and most important thing is that young people all over the world need to get political. We see that many young people would say we do not care about politics, we do not do politics, we do not want to get into politics. Some refuse the idea 100 percent and others will say: “I am a young person, I

want to live my life and maybe when I grow up I will start thinking whether I want to engage in politics.” I think what they do not know but should realise is that politics affects them even before they are born. Politics is not always about state politics, it is not always

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about foreign affairs. Politics is about people’s lives, and in some places it can affect you to the extent of telling you what you are allowed to wear, what you can eat and how you can behave. However, we see some young people radically saying: “We are independent, we want to do whatever we want to in our lives”, focusing on the closer relationships to them instead of focusing on the bigger picture. They do not think that their relationship with the state and their relationship with politics actually affect their personal life. But it can negatively limit their lives as well as positively provide opportunities for them.

### How would you like to see women to be involved in political processes?

When we talk about women we are talking about perspectives. I work a lot with women’s empowerment inside of Libya. Oftentimes, people assume that it is a matter of simply promoting for this type of gender, for example when I say I want to see more women in the ministry or as a prime minister. But for us, it is rather a matter of providing a different perspective. If

we have an affected community, if we have a matter we want to be solved, then the perfect and ideal solution would be asking and taking the opinions of the different groups within the society. And women – whether inside or outside of Libya – form at least 50 percent of the society. So if we are talking about solutions that will affect the whole community then we need this 50 percent perspective to be included.

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#### Hajer Sharief



was appointed by UN Secretary General as a member of the Advisory group for the progress study on youth peace and security, mandated by the Security Council resolution 2250. She is also an advocate for the Extremely Together Initiative on Countering Violent Extremism of the Kofi Annan Foundation. Hajer is project manager for the ‘Together We Build it’ organisation which she co-founded during the war in Libya in 2011. She has been since working on supporting the democratic process in Libya by emphasising the relevant role of women and youth in peacebuilding, conflict resolution and preventing violent extremism.

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