

# TAWAKKOL KARMAN

Tawakkol Karman, known as “the Mother of the Revolution” in Yemen for her devotion to activism and journalism, was born in Mekhlaf, Ta’izz Province in 1979. Her father, Abdul Salam, worked as a government minister for legal and parliamentary affairs. After earning a master’s degree in political science from Sana’a University, Karman and seven other female journalists’ helped found an organization that provides annual reports on press freedom in Yemen, *Women Journalists Without Chains* to oppose the constant abuse faced by women in peaceful protests. Tawakkol Karman was subject to continuous threats and harassment by the government. She was jailed more than once by the government of President Ali Abdallah Saleh. She was harassed by the government in the form of letters and telephone calls because of her refusal to accept the rejection of Women Journalists Without Chains’ application to legally create a newspaper and a radio station. Tawakkol Karman has also been subject to opposition from women of al-Iman University. A woman attempted to stab Karman at a protest in 2010. Women in Yemen who participated in peaceful protests have been subject to abuse for a very long time. In 2010, the government detained and harassed women, including Karman, who gathered to protest unjust taxation and suppression of dissent in Yemen.

Karman has produced the *Semi-Annual Press Freedom Report*, which states that violence against Yemeni journalists has increased. Unlike the 2006 report, which consisted of jailing cases against journalists, the 2007 report listed direct attacks and security abuses against journalists. In 2010 and 2011, Karman started a movement against the rule of President Saleh while activists in Egypt and Tunisia were fighting against their rulers. In April 2011, she said, “We are in the first stage of change in our country, and the feeling among the revolutionaries is that the people of Yemen will find solutions for our problems once the regime has gone, because the regime itself is the cause of most of them. A new Yemen awaits us, with a better future for all.” She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011 and became the youngest person to ever win the Nobel Peace Prize at the age of 32. She shared the Nobel Prize with two other female activists, Johnson Sirleaf and Leymah Gbowee for their “non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women’s rights to full participation in peace-building work.” Karman continues to pursue the goal of achieving journalistic freedom in Yemen.



Tawakkol Karman © Getty Images

“AT THIS MOMENT, AS I SPEAK TO YOU HERE, YOUNG ARAB PEOPLE, BOTH WOMEN AND MEN, MARCH IN PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATIONS DEMANDING FREEDOM AND DIGNITY FROM THEIR RULERS. THEY GO FORWARD ON THIS NOBLE PATH ARMED NOT WITH WEAPONS, BUT WITH FAITH IN THEIR RIGHT TO FREEDOM AND DIGNITY. THEY MARCH IN A DRAMATIC SCENE WHICH EMBODIES THE MOST BEAUTIFUL OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT OF SACRIFICE AND THE ASPIRATION TO FREEDOM AND LIFE, AGAINST THE UGLIEST FORMS OF SELFISHNESS, INJUSTICE AND THE DESIRE TO HOLD ON TO POWER AND WEALTH.”

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EXCERPTS FROM TAWAKKOL KARMAN: 2011 NOBEL PEACE PRIZE LECTURE

I have always believed that resistance against repression and violence is possible without relying on similar repression and violence. I have always believed that human civilization is the fruit of the effort of both women and men. So, when women are treated unjustly and are deprived of their natural right in this process, all social deficiencies and cultural illnesses will be unfolded, and in the end the whole community, men and women, will suffer. The solution to women's issues can only be achieved in a free and democratic society in which human energy is liberated, the energy of both women and men together. Our civilization is called human civilization and is not attributed only to men or women.

Since 1901, millions of people have died in wars which could have been avoided with a little wisdom and courage. The Arab countries had their share in these tragic wars, though their land is the land of prophecies and divine messages calling for peace. From this land came the Torah carrying the message: "Thou shalt not kill" and the Bible promising: "Blessed are the peacemakers," and the final message of the Koran urging "O ye who believe, enter ye into the peace, one and all." And the warning that "whosoever killeth a human being for other than manslaughter or corruption in the earth, it shall be as if he had killed all mankind."

However, in spite of its great scientific achievements, the history of humanity is stained with blood. Millions have fallen victims in the rise and fall of kingdoms. That is what ancient history tells us and what recent history confirms! Today's recent evidence tells us that the essence of messages calling for peace has repeatedly been trampled, and the human conscience has often been overrun by the voice of warplanes, rocket and missile launchers, bombs and all means of killing!

Mankind's feeling of responsibility to create a decent life and make it worth living with dignity, has always been stronger than the will to kill life. Despite great battles, the survival of the human race is the clearest expression of mankind's yearning for reconstruction, not for destruction, for progress, not for regression and death. This tendency is strengthened day after day with all available means of communications, thanks to the rapid and astonishing development of information technology and the communications revolution. Walls between human societies have fallen down and the lives and destinies of societies have converged, marking the emergence of a new phase, a phase where peoples and nations of the world are not only residents of a small village, as they say, but members of one family.

One can say that our contemporary world, which has been refined and developed by expertise and long experience, good and bad, is marching with confident steps towards the creation of a new world and shining globalization. It will be a new and positive world with human prospects and globalization which will guarantee the values of freedom, truth, justice and cooperation to all human beings. It will be a world where all relationships, dealings and laws will be based on the prohibition of all forms and practices of exclusion and enslavement of man by man. This will mean a

globalization where resorting to the law of power and its might, against groups, peoples and nations, in order to deprive them of their liberty and human dignity, will disappear, once and forever. Am I dreaming too much..?

Peace within one country is no less important than peace between countries. War is not just a conflict between states. There is another type of war, which is far more bitter, that is the war of despotic leaders who oppress their own people. It is a war of those to whom people have entrusted their lives and destinies, but who have betrayed that trust. It is a war of those to whom people have entrusted their security, but who directed their weapons against their own people. It is the war which today people face in the Arab States.

At this moment, as I speak to you here, young Arab people, both women and men, march in peaceful demonstrations demanding freedom and dignity from their rulers. They go forward on this noble path armed not with weapons, but with faith in their right to freedom and dignity. They march in a dramatic scene which embodies the most beautiful of the human spirit of sacrifice and the aspiration to freedom and life, against the ugliest forms of selfishness, injustice and the desire to hold on to power and wealth.

Peace does not mean just to stop wars, but also to stop oppression and injustice. In our Arab region, there are brutal wars between governments and peoples. Human conscience cannot be at peace while it sees these young Arab people being harvested by the machine of death which is unleashed against them by the tyrants. The spirit of the Nobel Peace Prize is the spirit of peace, in which today we look forward in support of the aspiration of the Arab peoples for democracy, justice and freedom. If we support this spirit then we will prove to the despots that the ethics of peaceful struggle are stronger than their powerful weapons of repression and war.

The revolutions of the Arab spring in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria, and the movement towards revolutions in other Arab countries such as Algeria, Morocco, Bahrain, Sudan and others didn't take place on isolated islands cut off from all the rapid and astonishing developments and changes which our world is witnessing. The Arab people have woken up to see how poor a share of freedom, democracy and dignity they have. The Arab people who are revolting in a peaceful and civilized manner have, for so many decades, been oppressed and suppressed by the regimes of authoritarian tyrants who have indulged themselves deeply in corruption and in looting the wealth of their people. They have gone too far in depriving their people of freedom and of the natural right to a dignified life. These regimes have totally disregarded the Arab people as a people with a legitimate human existence, and have let poverty and unemployment flourish among them in order to secure that the rulers and their family members after them will have full control over the people. Allow me to say that our oppressed people have revolted declaring the emergence of a new dawn, in which the sovereignty of the people, and their invincible will, will prevail. The people have decided to break free and walk in the footsteps of civilized free people of the world.

Many nations, including the Arab peoples, have suffered, although they were not at war, but were not at peace either. The peace in which they lived is a false “peace of graves”, the peace of submission to tyranny and corruption that impoverishes people and kills their hope for a better future. Today, all of the human community should stand with our people in their peaceful struggle for freedom, dignity and democracy, now that our people have decided to break out of silence and strive to live and realize the meaning of the immortal phrase of Caliph Omar ibn al-Khattab, “Since when have you enslaved people, when their mothers had given birth to them as free ones.”

When I heard the news that I had got the Nobel Peace Prize, I was in my tent in the Taghyeer square in Sana’a. I was one of millions of revolutionary youth. There, we were not even able to secure our safety from the repression and oppression of the regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh. At that moment, I contemplated the distinction between the meanings of peace celebrated by the Nobel Prize, and the tragedy of the aggression waged by Ali Abdullah Saleh against the forces of peaceful change. However, our joy of being on the right side of history made it easier for us to bear the devastating irony.

Millions of Yemeni women and men, children, young and old took to the streets in eighteen provinces demanding their right to freedom, justice and dignity, using non-violent but effective means to achieve their demands. We were able to efficiently and effectively maintain a peaceful revolution in spite of the fact that this great nation has more than seventy million firearms of various types.

And here I am now, standing before you in this solemn international ceremony. Here I am, in this unique moment, one of the most important moments of human history, coming from the land of the Arab Orient, coming from the Yemen of wisdom and ancient civilizations, the Yemen which is currently experiencing the greatest and the most powerful and the largest eruption of Arab spring revolution. This revolution will soon complete its first year since the moment it was launched as a peaceful and popular revolution of the youth, with one demand: peaceful change and the pursuit of free and dignified life in a democratic and civil state governed by the rule of law.

Our peaceful and popular youth revolution is not isolated or cut off from the revolutions of the Arab spring. However, with all regret and sadness, I should note that it did not get the international understanding, support or attention of the other revolutions in the region. This should haunt the world’s conscience because it challenges the very idea of fairness and justice.

Through you and your great universal forum, we send to the world a clear and expressive message in which we emphasize that:

- Our youth revolution is peaceful and popular and is rallied around by the people. I, on behalf of the revolutionary youth, pledge to all people in the world that we are committed to peaceful struggle as a strategic option, without deviation or retreat, regardless of the sacrifices and regardless of the extent of state repression, killing and violence.

- Our revolution is determined to fully change the corrupt conditions and ensure free and dignified life, regardless of sacrifices and bitter sufferings, until the establishment of a democratic civil state, a state where the rule of law, equality and a peaceful transfer of power prevails.
- Our peaceful popular youth revolution has succeeded in attracting to its ranks and marches hundreds of thousands of women who have fulfilled, and still fulfil, a major, noticeable and effective role in its activities, and in leading its demonstrations even to the smallest details.
- Because of the peaceful popular youth revolution, the voice and thundering march of young people have dominated and the voice of terror and explosive belts, which were employed by Ali Saleh as a justification for his rule, has faded away.

I would like to emphasize that the Arab spring revolutions have emerged with the purpose of meeting the needs of the people of the region for a state of citizenship and the rule of law. They have emerged as an expression of people’s dissatisfaction with the state of corruption, nepotism and bribery. They know that their revolutions pass through four stages which can’t be bypassed:

- Toppling the dictator and his family
- Toppling his security and military services and his nepotism networks
- Establishing the institutions of the transitional state.
- Moving towards constitutional legitimacy and establishing the modern civil and democratic state.

Today, the world should be ready and prepared to support the young Arab spring in all stages of its struggle for freedom and dignity. The civilized world should, immediately after the outbreak of the revolutions of youth, commence the detention and freezing of the assets of the figures of the regime and its security and military officials. In fact this is not enough, since these people should be brought to justice before the International Criminal Court. There should be no immunity for killers who rob the food of the people.

Finally, I ponder myself standing here before you, in this moment, which every man and woman aspires to reach because of the recognition and appreciation it contains. As I do so, I see the great number of Arab women, without whose hard struggles and quest to win their rights in a society dominated by the supremacy of men I wouldn’t be here. To all those women, whom history and the severity of ruling systems have made unseen, to all women who made sacrifices for the sake of a healthy society with just relationships between women and men, to all those women who are still stumbling on the path of freedom in countries with no social justice or equal opportunities, to all of them I say: thank you ... this day wouldn’t have come true without you.

Peace be upon you

# JOINING THE WOMEN OF PEACE AND CHANGE TAWAKKOL KARMAN

LESSON GRADE LEVEL: 8–12  
HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES: FREE ELECTIONS, PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY,  
NON-VIOLENT ACTIVISM, PARTICIPATION

## UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS:

**Article 1:** Right to Equality

**Article 3:** Right to Life, Liberty, Personal Security

**Article 7:** Right to Equality before the Law

**Article 20:** Right of Peaceful Assembly and Association

**Article 21:** Right to Participate in Government and in Free Elections

**Article 30:** Freedom from State of Personal Interference in all above Rights

## GUIDING QUESTION:

- What was the Arab Spring?
- What role did women, specifically Tawakkol Karmen, play in the uprising in Yemen?
- How have women advocated for peace throughout history?
- Why is it important for women and men to work together for human rights, peace and justice?

## TIME REQUIREMENT:

120 Minutes

## OBJECTIVES:

After this lesson, students will be able to:

- Identify countries involved in the Arab Spring uprisings.
- Know Tawakkol Karman as one of the leaders of the movement in Yemen and as part of a long line of women advocating for change.
- Identify women who have advocated for peaceful change throughout history.
- Examine the words women have used to advance change.

## STUDENT SKILLS:

- Critical thinking and problem solving
- Critical analysis of written text
- Writing a position statement to clarify a perspective
- Creative writing
- Public speaking

## VOCABULARY:

- **Non-violence**
- **Peace**
- **Conflict resolution**
- **Human rights**
- **Democracy**
- **Development**
- **Arab Spring**

## CONCEPTS:

- **Human rights**
- **Peace**
- **Nobel Peace Prize**
- **Social development**
- **Women's rights**
- **Humanity**
- **Revolution**

## TECHNOLOGY REQUIRED:

- Internet

## MATERIALS:

- Tawakkol Karman's Nobel speech Text: [http://www.democracynow.org/blog/2011/10/7/yemeni\\_nobel\\_peace\\_prize\\_laureate\\_tawakkul\\_karman\\_on\\_human\\_rights\\_abuses\\_enabled\\_by\\_war\\_on\\_terror](http://www.democracynow.org/blog/2011/10/7/yemeni_nobel_peace_prize_laureate_tawakkul_karman_on_human_rights_abuses_enabled_by_war_on_terror)
- Arab Spring interactive timeline: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/interactive/2011/mar/22/middle-east-protest-interactive-timeline>
- Map of Arab Spring countries: [http://tripline.net/trip/Map\\_of\\_the\\_Arab\\_Spring\\_Protests-2173004375451003A9ECA90105EA623D](http://tripline.net/trip/Map_of_the_Arab_Spring_Protests-2173004375451003A9ECA90105EA623D)
- Nobel Peace Prize Lecture: <http://www.nobelprize.org/mediaplayer/index.php?id=1775&view=1>
- Sheroes <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fvIQi5jhryk>
- Top 100 Global Thinkers: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/11/26/the-fp-top-100-global-thinkers/>

## STUDENT ACTIVITIES

### ANTICIPATORY SET:

*The democratic world, which has told us a lot about the virtues of democracy and good governance, should not be indifferent to what has happened in Yemen, Syria, Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, and happens in every Arab and non-Arab country aspiring for freedom. All of that is just hard labour during the birth of democracy which requires support and assistance, not fear and caution.*

*From Nobel speech*

*I would like to emphasize that the Arab spring revolutions have emerged with the purpose of meeting the needs of the people of the region for a state of citizenship and the rule of law. They have emerged as an expression of people's dissatisfaction with the state of corruption, nepotism and bribery. These revolutions were ignited by young men and women who are yearning for freedom and dignity.*

*From Nobel speech*

- 1 Using the map of Arab Spring countries, identify where Yemen is and discuss the actions taken in that uprising.
- 2 Read the above quotes by Karman.
- 3 Have students paraphrase Karman's words.
- 4 As a class, discuss what they have learned about Karman.

### ACTIVITY 1:

Karman emphasizes the role of youth and women in the Arab Spring uprisings, particularly in Yemen.

- 1 Read aloud the following quotes from Karman's Nobel speech. Give each student the quotes on a piece of paper.

*Our youth revolution is peaceful and popular and is motivated by a just cause, and has just demands and legitimate objectives, which fully meet all divine laws, secular conventions and charters of international human rights. Our revolution is determined to fully change the corrupt conditions and ensure free and dignified life, regardless of sacrifices and bitter sufferings, until the establishment of a democratic civil state, a state where the rule of law, equality and a peaceful transfer of power prevails.*

*Our peaceful popular youth revolution has succeeded in attracting to its ranks and marches hundreds of thousands of women who have fulfilled, and still fulfil, a major, noticeable and effective role in its activities, and in leading its demonstrations even to the smallest details. Not tens, but hundreds of these women have fallen as martyrs or been wounded for the sake of the victory of the revolution.*

- 2 Have students paraphrase the two quotes.
- 3 Using the quotes, the paraphrasing and discussion notes, have the students write a response to this prompt:

*"The future is literally in our hands to mold as we like. But we cannot wait until tomorrow. Tomorrow is now."*

*Eleanor Roosevelt*

- 4 Ask the students to read their pieces and allow time for class reflection on the differing responses.

### ACTIVITY 2

- 1 Give the students worksheet #1, consisting of quotes from women throughout history who have advocated and worked for peaceful change.
- 2 Distribute to the students the text of Karman's Nobel speech. Separate the students into groups and ask each group to read the text silently as the teacher reads it out loud. Then ask each group to reread the text and circle the vocabulary words that are pertinent to the Arab Spring uprising in Yemen. Have the students discuss the speech ensuring that they use the vocabulary words.
- 3 Drawing from Karman's Nobel speech and the selected quotes, have the students align the quotes with specific paragraphs that reflect the intent of the quotes.
- 4 Ask the students to select three quotes they think best align with the work of Karman.
- 5 Have the students research the authors of the quotes to get background information on their activities.
- 6 Have the students write a creative piece on the role of women in advancing peaceful change throughout history.

**TIPS FOR TEACHERS:** The quotes in worksheet #1 capture a small number of quotes by women. If you are studying a period of time, ask the students to research women from that period and select their quotes.

### CULMINATING ACTIVITY

- 1 Drawing on what was learned in activities 1 and 2, ask the students to choose one quote and write a one page speech on the similarities and differences experienced by women as agents of change throughout history.
- 2 Have the students consider the following questions in preparing their speech:
  - o What does word choice tell us about the need and desire for change?
  - o Was the cause mentioned in the quote achieved in the lifetime of the woman advocating for the change?

## BECOME A DEFENDER

*I have always believed that resistance against repression and violence is possible without relying on similar repression and violence. I have always believed that human civilization is the fruit of the effort of both women and men. So, when women are treated unjustly and are deprived of their natural right in this process, all social deficiencies and cultural illnesses will be unfolded, and in the end the whole community, men and women, will suffer. The solution to women's issues can only be achieved in a free and democratic society in which human energy is liberated, the energy of both women and men together. Our civilization is called human civilization and is not attributed only to men or women.*

*From Karmen's Nobel speech*

Karmen believes that in order to achieve a peaceful, just and free world, men and women must work together, equally. How do girls and boys work together in your school?

- 1 In small groups, consisting of both girls and boys, create an educational brochure, poster or video about the importance of women and men working together to create positive and peaceful change.
- 2 Research organizations working to advance the role of both women and men in achieving human rights and justice. Working with your teacher or advisor, select one or two organizations and support a human rights campaign they are working on.
- 3 Invite other groups, clubs, and teams to participate.
- 4 Organize a table during lunch or after school where you display your educational materials and get your fellow students to support your campaign.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### Tawakkol Karman

<http://www.tawakkolkarman.net/index.php?lng=english>  
English-language homepage for Karman and her advocacy.

### Nobel Prize

[http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/2011/karman.html#](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2011/karman.html#)

Information, photos, and speeches of Tawakkol Karman relating to her receiving the Nobel Peace Prize.

### 2012 International Women of Courage Award Ceremony

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9dnHw0Kustc>

Tawakkol Karman delivers remarks at the award ceremony in Washington, D.C.

### Global Voices Yemen Protests

<http://globalvoicesonline.org/specialcoverage/2011-special-coverage/yemen-protests-2011/>

Blog coverage of the 2011 Yemen protests.

### Women Journalists Without Chains

<http://womenpress.org/index.php?lng=english>

WJWC is a non-governmental organization in Yemen that seeks to advocate for rights and freedoms, especially freedom of expression. It also aims at improving media efficiency and providing skills for journalists, and particularly women and youth.

### Safe World for Women

<http://www.asafeworldforwomen.org/>

Further information on WJWC and other women's rights organizations.

### UC Davis Human Rights Initiative – Human Rights and the Arab Spring

<http://humanrightsinitiative.ucdavis.edu/category/human-rights-and-the-arab-spring/human-rights-and-the-arab-spring/>

Archive of articles on human rights and the Arab Spring.