

From My Story...

Unyielding Energy

I am Joumana Seif, a human rights lawyer and feminist activist.

The nature of my work at the European Centre for Constitutional and Human Rights requires a high level of responsibility, especially for someone like me, since many of my generation grew up in an environment where international law was given little importance, whether in education or practice. This reality compelled me to make significant efforts to read and learn in order to grasp this field, particularly in a language I wasn't entirely proficient in. Despite the difficulties, I saw this as both a challenge and a motivation. It was unacceptable for me not to actively engage in the critical discussions held at the Centre, especially since the Centre's teams come from diverse nationalities and contexts. Through my work at the ECCHR, which focuses primarily on international litigation and tracking mechanisms for monitoring and enforcing the law in regions affected by violations and challenges, I have clearly observed the vast gap between legal texts and their implementation on the ground.



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This discrepancy amplifies a profound sense of frustration, particularly in the face of the injustices and violations suffered by peoples. However, a significant part of the pain experienced by those of us in this field is sharing the pain endured by witnesses to these violations, as if it embeds itself within us. While we understand the importance of learning how to manage this psychological burden and protect ourselves, working on issues that deeply resonate with us—especially the Syrian cause—means that we all, as Syrians, carry the compounded weight of trauma, both from the past and the present. From the events of the 2011 Syrian revolution and its aftermath to the trauma of displacement and the immense challenges imposed by host countries, this burden persists.

On a personal level, my interest in public affairs began around 1993-1994, when my generation started engaging in political debates and public life, especially with the emergence of platforms like Al Jazeera and its programmes such as "The Other Opinion". In the early 2000s, I participated in the Damascus Spring through the National Dialogue forums that were being held, one of which was in our house. These forums played a significant role in shaping my initial political awareness, which later evolved into direct involvement in human rights work. Before that, I worked in the industrial sector with my family, but my focus has always been on social and humanitarian issues, particularly supporting workers and the broader community.



After my father's imprisonment around 2003, I decided to focus on my human rights activism academically, so I started my university studies at the Beirut Arab University, at the age of thirty three. I remember being in the third year while my son was preparing for his baccalaureate (high school) exams. Despite the immense pressures and significant challenges I faced due to my activism and political stances — which eventually led to my illegal dismissal from the lawyers' union following attempts to coerce me into compromising my principles — these experiences only strengthened my resolve.

To this day, I refuse to surrender to the harsh realities or allow any attempts to diminish our potential. This remains my message to young people today: no matter how difficult and long the road may seem, we must always keep moving forward.

JUMANA

