

# A Dress For the Happiest Day of My Life

*By Gabriela Benazar Acosta*

Growing up I couldn't resist the urge of wearing over my head every white sheet, cloth or veil I found lying around. I married all my friends—real and imaginary—and hated my school's 1998 nativity musical because I played Joseph and not a veil-wearing Virgin Mary. I've evolved from flower girl to bridesmaid; always with grace and hoping to one day wear the puffiest, whitest dress in my own wedding. I have, without doubt, what all the women's magazines describe as "wedding brains".

How could I be different? Somewhere in my mind, the idea of marriage as the most important life achievement rules over most of my decision-making process, especially in my relationships with men. This is why I thought I should start preparing for my Big Day and set up an appointment to try wedding gowns in Pronovias, as if I were close and imminent to the altar; because, to be honest, I already drafted how I want my wedding to be.

My parents always say there's no real merit in getting married. I understand them. With a divorce rate hitting its highest peak and all their siblings and most of their friends divorced or in their second (or third) marriages I see why they're skeptic. However, I still believe in marriage as a social institution. I not just believe in it, I want it.

The wedding industry has made us believe that this Big Day will be the happiest in our lives; hence everything—absolutely everything—must be perfect. But of all the things in a wedding bash, the bride's gown is probably the most important. Otherwise, why do gossip magazines devote thousands of pages to wedding gowns when a celebrity, or a royal, gets hitched? Why do grandmothers save their own dresses for generations to come? The gown seems to be, along with the bride, the center of the whole world's attention.

In Caracas, the closest you can get to a renowned designer is in the Pronovias Boutique. With a previous appointment, they devote all the time you need to find 5 dresses you can try on from a 120 gowns catalog.

When I arrived at the store I had a very specific idea of what I wanted. A lot of lace, zero rhinestones or sequins; a big skirt, but not one that made me look like a mermaid or a quinceañera. I thought I already had it narrowed down and that choosing would be an easy task, but I discovered I was wrong.

Trying a gown requires assistance and a superior knowledge of Newton's Laws. Any false step can make you trip down, break a bone and chip a tooth. But when you look for the first time in the mirror after the process of getting in, pulling the fabric down, arranging the skirt and tail and closing and fitting the dress, the bride-wannabes versions of yourself feel vindicated and proud. Because it's not a costume, a fabric or a raggedy dress, it's as real as it can get and you're living the dream.

With the first dress, I felt exactly as I thought I would. None of the princesses, real or fictitious, were as beautiful and perfect as I was. Everything about it, from the cleavage to the skirt, made me feel ready to scream from the top of the world that I believe in everlasting love.

Tseélon, in a study about how much attention women pay to the clothes they wear, determined that the highest level of self-consciousness about one's looks increases in special occasions such as weddings or crucial work situations because these events place us over the individual phase and are seen as social and cultural practices where looking in a certain way is expected. This explains why everyone expects a bride to look her best (if not perfect) for the big day.

It's very difficult to find the ideal dress in the first one you try. I had to try four until I found one that felt perfect. But at that point, I was exhausted. I grew tired of white, of inserting and removing the fabric, of details and cleavage, of tulle and lace. I also felt remorse over the first four gowns. I felt I had taken the place of other women, usurping their fantasies and profaning something very sacred.

However, with the fifth dress, I didn't feel that way. It had everything I've ever wanted and more. The skirt was as I always dreamed it would be, the cleavage modest but sort of sexy and the lace looked like something only angels should wear.

They lend me a veil to “get a better picture” of how it would look in the actual Big Day and other customers stopped by me to tell me I looked perfect and gorgeous (an event without precedent in our whole wedding gown experience). “This is your dress, you won’t find anything more stunning than this. It’s perfect”, one very pregnant lady told me.

I looked in the mirror and agreed. There’s no way I would find in the Metropolitan Area of Caracas something that would fit better than that gown. But something felt inadequate. Maybe I was just really tired. I shared this sensation with the sales assistant who was helping me and added that sometimes I feel like maybe something simpler, with less fabric, in a less sumptuous venue with only family and close friends was the way to go. She replied: “You only get one Big Day: YOUR day. Make the most of it”.

Then I realized that it’s actually not my day. Or at least I don’t want it to be. I want my wedding to be a celebration of finding someone special with whom I can share my life, dreams and rough moments with. I want it to be the day when we —as a couple —tell society, the law, his church or mine, and whoever wants to listen that we love each other and are willing to build a family based on mutual values and fidelity. It’s not my day, it’s our day.

Yes, I won’t deny I felt very special with the white princess gown. But this thought refused to leave my mind, and after they disclosed the prices of two of the dresses I tried on it settled forever. For my first choice, designed by Elie Saab, I had to pay thirteen thousand dollars. For the other one, the last one I wore, I had to pay around five.

These five thousand dollars translated in (at the time) 70 monthly incomes of minimum wage Venezuelan workers. I can’t wear something this expensive only once. I can’t overlook the fact that spending that amount of money on a dress in one of the most depressed economies of the Western Hemisphere is absurd. Or at least I feel it is. Between my new realizations and the prices of the gowns, I remembered the scene in the Cinderella movie when her carriage turns into a pumpkin.

My eternal fantasy of the perfect wedding dress had lost all the magic and was now as dead and unappealing as a vegetable lying in the middle of the road. It was also over, as Cinderella's magical night with the Prince.

I no longer believe a wedding is the happy ending after a series of very expensive purchases, fights, and the quest for the perfect dress I have been sewing in my mind for so long. A wedding is the beginning of a very important chapter and I definitely don't want it to start from the premise that it's only my day and that I need a "perfect" and expensive gown to have a happy, loving marriage.

# “I grew up in a movie set”

*By Gabriela Benazar Acosta*

After going to Law School in Universidad Metropolitana looking for something different than 35 mm movie rolls and the sounds of clapperboards that marked his childhood, Joel Novoa returned to the place where it all started: a movie set.

Despite his evasion from the movie industry, Novoa founded a company that produced corporate videos while in Law School and he discovered he had more fun working behind the cameras than in his classes. Therefore, he moved to Los Angeles to study at the American Film Institute. A few years later, he returned with several short films and with his first movie.

The film *Esclavo de Dios* (God's Slave) narrates the story of two extremists, one Israeli and one Muslim, towards the never solved events that took place in the Israeli Mutual Association of Argentina (AMIA) in 1994. That day, a car bomb exploded killing 80 persons and injuring 300.

The movie turns around two subjects that Novoa finds very interesting: impunity and radicalism. He explains that despite the events took place 19 years ago, the perpetrators of the attack were never identified and that no effort has been made to find them. The only thing that was left is a sense of impunity that trespasses Argentina to all the Jewish communities in Latin America.

Novoa represented the radicalism through the two main characters of the movie, whom despite their different origins are equally extremist without meeting a middle point. “I’m not obsessed with terrorism, It’s not a subject that has interested me since my childhood. What I find very appealing is understanding how the extremist mind works, probably because It’s very different from mine, and what can I do to understand it. I haven’t so far, but I tried and made a huge effort to make a movie about it”, said Novoa.

The cost of talking about this sensitive subject has been very high. He was accused by different media and public figures, including William Castillo, the president of TVES, of creating a pro-Israeli and anti-Venezuelan movie despite its funding came from CNAC and different international organism. "This is exactly why I make movies, to create a confrontation, a debate. If a person watches (them) and leaves the projection pissed is because he is a radical. We showed the movie in an institute in England and those in the audience who identified themselves as pro-Israel found the movie pro-Palestine and vice-versa. The message I'm trying to send is based on union and mutual respect".

"Originally, *Esclavo de Dios* wasn't a movie. I started investigating about the AMIA attack because I found the subject interesting and I found links between what happened with Venezuela. Many people don't know that. After researching so much I realized I had enough material to make a movie but not in a dramatic code, as it has been told before, but in a thriller", said Novoa.

For Novoa, his movies are born in histories he witnesses in the streets and in what we, as human beings, experience. "The cinema is based on the streets", he reflects.

The human is translated into a non-verbal code for him. Hence, all his films aren't 100% in Spanish and he adventures when directing actors that speak languages he doesn't understand because it allows him to concentrate in other elements usually unobserved when paying full attention to the dialogues. "We don't speak exclusively with words, we do it with our body and our actions. When you don't understand the language (when directing), you can concentrate more on the physical actions, the emotional details".

After *Esclavo de Dios*, Joel is moving to England to direct the sequel of *ID*, a film from the 90's that portraits a Muslim man infiltrating a racist organization. He knows about the coincidences between the plot of his first movie and the next one, so he laughs and says: "I've been labeled, I know".

Further on from this next project, *Esclavo de Dios* and other ones that will take place in Los Angeles in March 2014, Novoa refuses to forget what's important and meaningful for him today and his true motivations to make films.

"If two years ago someone had told me that right now I would be debuting my first film, with international projection, my very own manager and all the stuff that's happening right now I wouldn't have believed it. I would like to remember this moment as I'm living it now: humbly. In the end, what people like about movies is the human aspect and I wouldn't like my films to lose that trait".

### **"I grew up in a movie set"**

Joel is the son of Elia Schenider and José Ramón Novoa, both award-winning filmmakers and references in the Venezuelan film industry, and he defends his heritage: "I would be lying if I told you I didn't learn anything from them, even though I spent some time denying it to myself. With time, I've come to terms with it and now I can say proudly they were my first cinema school and it's something on my favor and my advantage".

He's very aware that his movie, and all future work, might be compared to his parents work. He admires what they do, but feels their styles differ very much from his signature. "It's impossible not to compare, as long as the three of us keep making movies, people are going to compare them against each other".

Novoa reaffirms himself on a daily basis by learning and working. That's why he's always developing new things outside Venezuela. For him, this ain't a family matter anymore. "I've never gone so deep with something in my life as I have gone with cinema. I didn't want to do it before only as a family tradition, I wanted to do it and I did it to make it mine".

# The Majority

*By Gabriela Benazar Acosta*

I've never been a violent protester. I've spent 14 of my 23 years living situations that repeat themselves as a 90's comedy rerun: economic measures, violence rates that keep growing without constraint, delinquency, protests, speeches, long conversations in family meals about politics, while drinking whisky, that always end the same way: "We cannot keep living like this", "We've reached rock bottom".

The last months have been especially convulsed in Venezuela with the presidential elections and the first mandatory's cancer battle. Therefore, the day of his investment I decided to attend the congregation made in his honor. We all knew he wouldn't be there to comply the first constitutional requirement of his investiture. The word used by the government to diminish the importance of his physical presence for the event was that it represented only a mere "formalism" and they decided to substitute the traditional investiture ceremony with an oath taken by all the president's followers under the slogan: "We are all Chávez".

People always sold me the idea that Chávez and his party won the elections because the National Electoral Council was irregular and corrupt. I also witness many times how, from the opposition leaders to friends and neighbors, said that all the ruling party's concentrations were filled with public employees who were forced to attend and with the party's followers that lived outside Caracas and where brought to the capital by bus.

During the subway ride to the concentration, all these theories started to pop in my head when a group of students entered the train led by two foreigners (the government has been largely accused of giving residents voting privileges reserved for Venezuelan citizens). However, the more we approach our destination, the more people going to the same place as us filled the train. At that moment I realized that even though the foreigner's presence took my attention, they were now a substantive minority.

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When you descend the subway and fall into a giant mass of people that move you- willingly or not- towards the direction of the majority you feel like if a hurricane is pulling you. The notions of time and space are void by the noises, images and smell that surrounds you. Leaving this force is difficult, but sometimes it's smoother to stay in it until you reach the final destination.

I decided to leave. Staying there would imply missing of the events taking place in the cathetus and witnessing only what was happening in the hypotenuse. I needed to see everything. I need to prove wrong the feeling that the theories flooding my head in the subway were false.

Walking by Bolivar Square made me perceive the different groups of people assisting to the concentration. Yes, they were public employees easy to distinguished for their faces filled with boredom that screamed "I want to be somewhere else" and their concerned with the sales in the stores that surround the square over actually participating actively, by declaring their love for the president to media or changing into red clothes, in the popular oath.

However, the more you distanced yourself from the square, the smaller this group looked and the hurricane pulled you in again. As we approach the Palacio de Gobierno, all my beliefs regarding this type of events started crumbling.

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I'll take you about five blocks to reach a little further of Puente Llaguno. In every single one of the streets, you could find at least one stage with a different person giving a speech that affirmed his (or hers) commitment socialism or playing a range of music that started in joropo and ended in reggaeton.

Everything I want to take home that day I could find it for free there. T-Shirts with supporting messages to the president, presidential bands made of paper, flyers, water bottles, soft caps, vuvuzuelas, food, beer, and further on. I remembered when my sister paid one hundred bolívares for a cap to support the opposition candidate Henrique Capriles Radonski; I recalled when a friend paid ten for a bracelet with his "There's a way" slogan printed and I understood that no one can compete against the ruling party's budget.

At some point, reality strikes us, regardless of how much we tried to avoid it. Five blocs into the concentration I realized that majority, so I cannot state I relate or share my political views with, exists without a doubt. Those eight million votes that gave the president one more term were there, not all in body but in spirit.

Constitutionalists, lawyers, judges and political experts debated about the legality and legitimacy of the aforementioned popular oath that took place in the concentration. Agreeing or not, I could feel was that something “got broken” that day but, regardless of everything, it was by the will of the majority. Still, I heard how in order to respect this popular will the Constitution of the Republic was only “a reference” and felt extremely worried about this statement.

I've been feeling bitter for years thanks to the Venezuelan politics; for wanting to live in a country where I believe things would be better if the power was in the hands of an electoral minority; for wanting to pursue that notion I believe is progress.

I won't abandon my political ideas and inclinations, but I now believe that considering what this majority wants will give me a wider notion of how to make our nation grow, of how to abandon polarization to create links to build what we all want: a better country, with opportunities and prosperity to all of us.

I spent the trip back from the concentration (I didn't stay for the oath) in silence. The bubble I lived in for years was just burst and I needed time and space to process everything that I just witnessed. The celebration, the passion of people for president Chávez's process, the fact that the majority of those who attended were there willingly, was too much for me to handle at once.

I don't think any of this will make me feel I need to become more involved with an ideology I don't share. I don't believe either this is a reason to feel discouraged when standing up against human rights violations and the uncontrollable violence we suffer daily. What I do believe in order that to have a safe, prosperous and developed country I need to start by understanding my fellow citizens.

# Iron Will

*By Gabriela Benazar Acosta*

Ukraine found itself between a rock and a hard place. On one side, the European Union offered them economic opportunities to bring them closer to the community. On the other hand, the Kremlin was offering a membership to the Eurasian Customs Union.

Although both sides tried to make the best offer, the former Soviet country looked eager to join the EU and spent months promoting its inclusion to the Union to its citizens.

But less than a week before signing the deal with Brussels, Viktor Yanukovich got cold feet. Fifteen billion dollars in economic aid from Russia, plus generous discounts and credits in gas, made Yanukovich pivot Ukraine's International Policies 180 degrees towards the East.

However, merely the intention of leaning away from the promised EU community was enough to unravel massive protest in Kiev. What started as a peaceful protest quickly escalated into violent confrontations between the citizens and police forces.

The Ukrainian Parliament also recently passed a law making illegal all anti-government protests, a move "towards dictatorship," according to the Ukrainian opposition. The European Union and The United States expressed their concern with the situation. Carl Bildt, Finland's Minister of Foreign Affairs, pointed out that this parliamentary measure was: "The most solid package of repressive laws I have seen sanctioned by a European parliament in decades."

Last Sunday, when the parliament approved these laws, a peaceful protest was taking place in Independence Square when violence erupted between protesters and the police near the Kiev's Dinamo Stadium. Over 200 people were injured, 20 were detained, and the surroundings of the iconic sporting venue were destroyed.

That same night, opposition leader Vitali Klitschko met Yanukovich to negotiate a truce between both parties.

Overnight, Yanukovich left the table and put his Secretary of the Defense and National Security Council, Andréi Kliúyev, in charge of talking with the opposition. They did not welcome this initiative since Kliúyev among those responsible for repressing protesters. Klitschko warned the President after his decision that the country was on the verge of a civil war. "Do not repeat Ceausescu and Gaddafi's destiny," he stated.

Anna Guerman, a deputy from Ukraine's ruling party, pointed that Yanukovich delegated the direct negotiation with the opposition for no reason other than to wait until he fully understood their demands. The President stated that he must represent all the citizens and not just a faction.

This is the first violent escalation in decades for the Eastern European nation after two months of tension between the government and the opposition. The President's political will is being tested in the streets of Kiev by an opposition armed with Molotov bombs, stones and sticks against a police force repressing everyone, armed or not, with tear gas and rubber bullets.

This morning, the protesters reported receiving text messages that read: "Dear subscriber, you have been registered as a participant in the massive riots," evidence that the government is also using the cell phone signal towers to identify those who present in the crowd by triangulating their positions.

The question here is who will yield first, an opposition that is accustomed to accomplishing political victories through peaceful protest, or a government that insists on imposing its will on the citizens.

The destiny of this polarized, steel-producing nation no longer depends on Vladimir Putin or the European Union; its faith resides in its citizens.

# From the Arab Spring to Morsi: why the Egyptians are protesting again

*By Gabriela Benazar Acosta*

Two years ago, inspired by the revolution taking place in Tunisia, the Egyptians took the streets to protest against the government's corruption and ousted president Hosni Mubarak after thirty years in power. For the past days, the Arab nation is convulsing with protesters that took back the streets to ask Mohammed Morsi, the president elected only a year ago, to leave office. What happened during the past 365 days since his election that made the Egyptians ask for his demission?

## **Same old problems**

With last years elections, the Egyptian citizens had a taste of democracy for the first time in decades and elected the candidate supported by the Muslim Brotherhood, making him president with more than 13 million votes. However, after his first year in office, the problems that Egypt faced during Mubarak`s government were far worst.

The economy was deteriorating. The tourism industry was facing tough times due to the political unrest that started with the Arab Spring, public services, such as electricity and gasoline, were constantly failing or scarce, and unemployment rates rose 13% affecting mostly young men in productive ages.

## **Morsi, the Pharaoh**

Another cause listed by protesters- and maybe the most important one- was Morsi's attempt to consolidate under his arm absolute power over Egypt. Last year, through a constitutional reform, he moved the country closer to an Islamic state after decades of laicism and try, without success, to approve a decree that gave him more powers than what corresponds to the Chief-of-State according to the country`s laws.

This was perceived as an authoritarian move since even though most Egyptians are Muslim, they don't agree that politics and religion should go together. Those who have opposed this measures have been, at least, ignored and sided from all important decisions by the government.

While delivering the report on his first year as president, Morsi spoke through radio and television to his citizens in a defiant and threatening tone when addressing the opposition, different members of the Egyptian judicial system and several media, to whose owners he referred by name.

### **No Support from The Army**

After the numerous protest and the taking, one more time, of Tahrir Square by the protesters, the Army gave an ultimatum to the President: either he complies the demands of the citizens in the next 48 hours or they would intervene in the crisis. Morsi, answering to the military and the opposition, rejected the ultimatum and stated he was the legitimate president of the country, despite the efforts made by Tamarod to raise 22 million signatures asking for his resignation.

### **Back to Tahrir**

After last weekend, protests took place on a daily basis and the death toll now rises to 20 people and more than 200 injured. Tahrir Square, an icon of the Arab Spring, is one more time scenario to the revolts. Besides the message against the government, the protesters are also criticizing Barack Obama for his government's approach to the situation. In 2011, the United States supported the manifestations against Hosni Mubarak, but this time his cabinet has been more cautioned when addressing the issue. Therefore, the opposition has accused him of supporting terrorism since they considered the Muslim Brotherhood a radical Islamist group.

### **So, No One Supports Morsi?**

Polarization reigns in the Arab country. Despite the request for his resignation, Morsi finds supporters in the most religious and traditional sectors of the population that, just like him, swore to die defending the legitimacy of his government.

## 4 Questions On Chemical Weapons

*By Gabriela Benazar Acosta*

What began as the Arab Spring's arrival in Syria, turned into one of the most complex internal conflicts of the past years. According to the United Nations, the struggle between Bashar Al Assad and the opposition, mostly represented through the Free Syrian Army, has left more than 100.000 people dead and an estimate of more than 4 million refugees in the neighboring countries or internally displaced within the Arab State. However, the conflict that was left unresolved by the Former Secretary General of the UN Kofi Annan's Especial Mission just took a 180-degree turn from bad to worst.

The White Houses announced that they have proof Bashar Al Assad's government used chemical weapons after the opposition denounced a Sarin Gas attack in the outskirts of Damascus that killed over 1400 people, crossing the "red line" President Obama had drawn months before. Since this is a situation unwitnessed since the Iraq-Iran War, we answer four questions regarding this type of armament.

### **What are chemical weapons?**

A lot of the substances used as weapons weren't created for that purpose, However, if you use them in certain quantities and with the intention of causing damage they are considered by the International Community as chemical weapons. According to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), these are: "Toxic chemicals and their precursors, except where intended for purposes not prohibited under this Convention, as long as the types and quantities are consistent with such purposes" and "Munitions and devices, specifically designed to cause death or other harm through the toxic properties of those toxic chemicals specified in subparagraph (a), which would be released as a result of the employment of such munitions and devices".

Chemical weapons can be classified at large in paralyzing agents, blood agents, nerve agents, blister agents, choking agents, tear agents and vomiting agents.

## **What is Sarin Gas?**

It's the weapon allegedly used by the Syrian Government against the civilians. It was first developed in Germany as a pesticide and it's colorless, insipid and odorless in its most pure form. The exposition occurs when its liquid form comes into contact with the skin or when it's disseminated as steam, affecting those who inhale it or come into direct contact with it.

The consequences of exposure vary on the time a person was in contact with the agent. The first symptoms can appear several minutes after being exposed or up to 18 hours afterward.

Sarin Gas is an agent that blocks and interferes the neurotransmitters that control muscles and glands overstimulating them. This makes the body unable to control some functions and, with high doses, prone to loss of consciousness, convulsions, paralysis and respiratory failures. In smaller doses, it can cause nausea and vomits, excessive sweat and watery eyes.

## **How are chemical weapons prohibited?**

If we discuss numbers, there are more countries that signed and ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention than those who did with the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The OPCW, an organism affiliated to the United Nations, is the body in charge of regulating and supervising the chemical arsenals to make sure none of the Member States has enough to develop this type of weapons. The main issue is that Syria, along with South Sudan, Egypt, Angola, and DPRK, isn't a member of the organization.

On the other hand, the United Nations can't deliver especial controls or sanctions on Syria since Russia and China veto most resolutions regarding the conflict in the Security Council. Any military offensive from The United States or the European Union won't count with the support of the UN because it won't be authorized by the Council.

## **When has this type of armament been used before?**

Saddam Hussein supposedly used Sarin Gas and Sulfur mustard against Iran in 1980. This was never confirmed by any organism that didn't take direct participation in the conflict. In Japan, Aum Shinrikyo used them twice in 1994 in an assassination attempt in the Matsumoto subway leaving 20 people dead and over 5000 affected.



# The Arab Spring, Three Years Later

*By Gabriela Benazar Acosta*

What is the current situation in the Arab countries three years after the Arab Spring started in Tunisia? Here we recount the current situation of the scenes most impacted by this socio-political phenomenon.

## **Syria**

Of all the countries with high profile protest, Syria is the only one that so far hasn't accomplished important constitutional changes or managed to remove its head of State. Currently, Syria is submerged in an armed conflict between the government of Bashar Al Assad, the Free Syrian Army, and Islamic militias operating throughout the country.

## **Egypt**

Egyptians were among the first to follow the Tunisian lead and take to the streets, especially Tahrir Square, to protest. They achieved their goal of ousting then-president Hosni Mubarak and called for presidential elections. The winner was Mohammed Morsi, the Muslim Brotherhood candidate. A year after, more protests erupted, and the Egyptian army deposed Morsi and formed an interim government to work on a constitutional reform towards a more secular project, parting from Morsi's idea of an Islamic Magna Carta. There is a constitutional referendum scheduled for January 15, 2018, and the sentences of Mubarak, his children, and others accused of killing protesters during the Arab Spring on January 25, 2011, will also be dictated in early January.

## **Libya**

The protests against Muammar Gaddafi (until his death the longest Head of State of an African country, a title now held by Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe) turned violent very quickly when the Libyan army harshly repressed the protesters. It is not yet clear how each part of the military participated, but the UN Security Council acted fast upon reports of massacres from both parties and established an air exclusion zone over Libya.

After the international intervention that included providing arms to the opposition and a NATO operation, Gaddafi went into hiding until he was found and publicly executed by militiamen.

Since then, Libya's government has been unable to deal with the armed militias that control several of its provinces and that are fighting among themselves to gain power the central government doesn't seem to be able to grasp.

## **Yemen**

The reason behind the protest in Yemen was quite simple: its people rejected Ali Abdullah Saleh, president of the north since 1978 and of the unified country since 1990 when he ran for reelection. Peaceful protests soon turned violent and the situation required a UN diplomatic intervention. However, by January 22, 2012, a year after the manifestations began, Saleh surrendered power and abandoned the country. Elections were called, and only Abd Rabbuh Mansur al-Hadi, the previous administration's vice-president, ran. Mansur is supposed to govern only for two years while a new constitution is drafted and approved. The biggest challenge right now for Yemen is the growing presence of Al Qaeda in its territory, constantly carrying out attacks around the offices of the government.

## **Tunisia**

Everything started when a 26-year-old fruit seller by the name of Mohamed Bouazizi immolated himself to protest the terrible living conditions, lack of opportunities, and rampant corruption in his country. His actions generated a chain reaction that led the Tunisians to demand that their president, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, quit. Once he flew to exile in Saudi Arabia, a transition government was formed, but its members quickly resigned. Today, Tunisia is working toward the secularization and democratization of its state and institutions.

# The UN Delivers Verdict Over Chemical Weapons Use in Syria

*By Gabriela Benazar Acosta*

Three weeks after the attack in Goutha, the United Nations made public the report a special mission prepared to investigate the accusations of chemical weapons use in Syria. The conclusion was that, indeed, Bashar Al Assad's government used this type of armament against civilians.

The UN mission was already in the Arab country recollecting evidence of the other fourteen denounces the opposition made in the past two and a half years of chemical weapons use in the conflict.

To determine it, the mission interviewed the survivors of the Goutha attack, documented the remains and subcomponents of the munitions they found, recollected environmental samples, evaluated the medical history of the survivors and recollected blood, urine and hair samples from them. In order to do this, a truce was made and a ceasefire was agreed during five hours daily for three days so the UN convoy could work without problems.

The samples went through two different laboratories. The first detected the presence of sarin in 85% of the blood samples, and the second one in 91% of them. The urine samples results are available from only one lab that detected a presence of the gas in 93% of them.

In the report, the mission's representatives stated their surprise when they found persons that were still suffering side effects from the gas more than a week after the attack and when they found sarin residues in the surface and objects in the surroundings of where the missiles that contained the chemical weapon strike.

On the other hand, it was determined that missiles carried between 50 and 56 liters of sarin gas in its liquid form and were probably fired from two different locations.

The atmospheric conditions of the moment they impacted made the propagation of the gas easier and more effective. By this and the type of missiles, the report states that they suspect Bashar Al Assad's army fired them, since Syria has a long military tradition whose training gives them the knowledge to manipulate and access this type of weapons, since until September 14th of this year Syria didn't belong to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

Despite there's no formal accusation against any of the parts involved in the conflict and thanks to the diplomatic efforts carried by the US and Russia, Syria agreed to enter OPCW and to destroy its chemical weapons arsenal by mid-2014.

Since a crime against humanity was committed, the entity responsible for the attack in Goutha must respond for this either at the Security Council, according to resolution 1738, or at the International Criminal Court, the international body responsible for processing and judging in this type of offenses.