In 2011, a peaceful revolution broke out in defiance of despotic regimes across the Arab world. From Tunisia to Egypt and Yemen and beyond, citizens rose up in support of prosperity and progress in nations where authoritarian rule suppressed – often violently – advances in freedom, justice, science, democratic elections and human rights. One of the key international faces of the movement that came to be known as the Arab Spring was the Yemeni journalist, politician, peace-builder and human rights activist Tawakkol Karman, who sparked her own activist streak by organizing student rallies in Sana’a – the largest city in Yemen. By mobilizing forces against the regime of President Ali Abdullah Saleh, she helped push for his resignation the following year.

Karman was imprisoned on several occasions in 2011 – in some cases locked up in chains – prompting heightened protests for her release by fellow students, activists and politicians who began calling her “Iron Woman” and “Mother of the Revolution” for her efforts to mobilize the Yemeni populace against Saleh’s rule. When the Arab Spring exploded that year, her human rights efforts became known globally through social media channels and the Western embrace of her cause. By year’s end, she was the co-recipient of the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize, along with Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and women’s rights activist Leymah Gbowee, lauded “for their non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women’s rights to full participation in peace-building work.” Karman is the first Yemeni, the first Arab woman and the second Muslim woman to win a Nobel Prize.

Born in Taiz – Yemen’s third-largest city – in 1979 to a lawyer and politician father who served in Ali Abdullah Saleh’s government, Karman studied commerce at the University of Science and Technology in Sana’a before receiving a graduate degree in political science. While working as a journalist she co-founded Women Journalists Without Chains as a means of advocating for freedom of opinion and expression and democratic rights for women around the world. Later on in her career she became a senior member of the Al-Islah political party, an opposition movement whose core constituents include groups that were crucial in overthrowing Egypt’s regime in 2012.

A popular voice in the Arab world, she is also a noted journalist in Western countries, including the U.S. and the U.K., and speaks regularly on her triumphs and challenges as a human rights activist, politician and Arab Spring participant. She advocates directing key resources – including education, social equality and responsible investment – to dictatorships and developing nations where poverty is rampant and freedom is routinely suppressed. She offers hopeful solutions that promote the democratic spirit and end to despotic rule across the globe.