

Education Regarding Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in the State of Qatar

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, QATAR

Human rights have been considered as one of the most important subjects that the world has ever known. They will gain increasing interest at all levels, national and international, whether from researchers or practitioners. This increasing interest is largely due to the fact that the subject of human rights is greatly related to human dignity. Human rights protect human dignity and maintain people's humanity. Human rights are the outcomes of both centuries of human history and the experiences of civilizations all over the world.

The State of Qatar has been a pioneer in the field of human rights. Qatar has followed the way of democracy, taking steps such as the closure of the Ministry of Information, granting citizens the right to be elected into public office, holding municipal elections, and exerting continuous efforts to activate the role of civil society. An absolute majority of the people directly voted to approve the final and permanent Constitution of the State of Qatar on 29 April 2003.

The Constitution includes 40 articles that deal with human rights particularly Article 146. This article deals with the regulations related to rights and general freedoms guaranteed to Qatari citizens. The following discussion presents the efforts of the Ministry of Education of the State of Qatar on the application of human rights and basic freedoms.

Human rights and the law

The State of Qatar ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child on 3 April 1995. The State of Qatar, its Ministries especially the Ministry of Education, and its different institutions are intent on making children become aware of the principles of human rights and freedoms stipulated by the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights through the following laws and legislations:

1. The Constitution states that:

Education is an essential pillar, which aids in achieving progress in society. It is supported by the State, which spares no effort to spread and disseminate it. (Article 25)

The State is exerting all efforts to implement compulsory education as stipulated in the laws and regulations of the State of Qatar. (Article 49)

2. The Emiri Decision No. 25 issued in September 2001 by His Highness Sheikh Hamad

Bin Khalifa, the Emir of the State of Qatar, details compulsory education for all children in Qatar. The 2001 Ministerial Decision No. 48 and modified by the 2003 Ministerial Decision No. 7 detail the formation of a special committee to execute the Emiri Decision No. 25

3. The 2003 Ministerial Decision No. 27 establishes a department for Pre-School education entitled the Chairmanship of Pre-School Education
4. The 2004 Ministerial Decision No. 4 details the formation of a Supreme Committee for the dissemination in schools of the principles included in the Convention on the Rights of the Child
5. The 2004 Ministerial Decision No. 5 details the formation of a Committee to consolidate the educational values at schools. It also provides that the Supreme Committee shall supervise the project on inclusion of students with special needs into the education system.

In general, the State wishes to aid the future of the next generations by achieving the goals of these educational policies concerning human rights, represented in the following guidelines:

- All citizens should be trained on the rights of citizenship and political participation
- Education should make the students learn the value and practice of work, production and perfection
- It should enable students to become proficient in the essentials of education such as reading, writing, and mathematics
- It should provide students with knowledge in advanced sciences, methods of research, and scientific exploration
- It should promote the proper skills and attitude of self-education in order to create a society that seeks knowledge constantly
- It should urge the citizens to be trained on the skills of expressing one's self in different ways

- It should train students on the practical uses of computers
- It should develop their ability to create, invent, think methodically, and their practical applications
- It should develop talented and creative students and prepare a scholastic environment that enhances their skills and hobbies
- It should rehabilitate those with special needs in a way that help them efficiently join the society
- It should obliterate the source of illiteracy and achieve continuous progress in the promotion of adult education.

Qatari laws and legislations do not differentiate between men and women; however, the particular needs of women are taken into consideration in some cases. There are specific legal provisions concerning childbirth leave (including breastfeeding leave and childcare leave), leave for female Qatari employees whose husbands die, and leave for special circumstances.

Human rights in the educational systems

In order to implement the provisions of the Constitution in a quantitative as well as a qualitative manner and to assert the right to education of all people, the Ministry of Education seeks to establish schools throughout the State of Qatar. There are several quantitative indications of progress of realizing human rights in the State of Qatar demonstrated by:

- Progress in Kindergarten and Pre-School Education: Originally, Kindergarten was managed by a special sector and the Ministry of Education's role was confined to issuing licenses, providing technical and managerial supervision, and providing financial support each year. However, after adopting the Educational Policy, Pre-School education is now considered part of the education system. The State has established public, government-affiliated Kindergartens, paving the

way for Pre-School education to become accredited and added to the other three stages of education, namely, Primary, Preparatory, and Secondary. The Ministry of Education indicates that in scholastic year 2003-2004, there are five Kindergartens affiliated with the government, which includes eight hundred thirty-four Qatari children distributed into fifty classes.

- **Achieving Equality between the Two Sexes:** In the 2001-2002 scholastic year, there were 113,188 students who joined schools in the State of Qatar. In the 2003-2004 scholastic year, 119,254 students were enrolled, achieving an increase of 60,66 students, 5 percent increase from the previous scholastic year (2001-2002). Schools in Qatar have 49 percent girls and 51 percent boys, indicating near equal numbers of girls and boys.
- **Indications of Increasing Number and Equality of Students Joining Primary School:** There were 64,255 students who went to primary school in the 2001-2002 scholastic year. In the 2003-2004 scholastic year, 65,291 students entered primary school, a two percent increase in the number of primary school students, with 49 percent girls and 51 percent boys.
- **Indications of Increasing Number and Equality of Students Joining Middle (Preparatory) School:** There were 27,519 students who joined Middle School in the previous scholastic year. In the 2003-2004 scholastic year, there were 29,483 students in Middle School, a seven percent increase in the number of students in Middle School, with 47 percent girls and 53 percent boys.
- **Indications of Increasing Number and Equality of Students Joining Secondary School:** There were 21,414 students who entered secondary schools in the 2002-2003 scholastic year. In the 2003-2004 scholastic year, there were 24,480 students in secondary schools, a fourteen percent increase in the number of students in secondary school, with 51 percent girls and 49 percent boys.

Promoting human rights

The State of Qatar promotes human rights through the following qualitative indications:

- **Providing the opportunity for children to express themselves:** in the three levels of education (primary, preparatory, and secondary), there are groups on library, press, and scholastic broadcast through which children can fully express their opinions. There are also magazines, bulletins, researches, and published studies. The Ministry of Education organizes cultural and informational debates among students in order to encourage them to express their opinions, and advocates local visits for students to different corporations in order to develop efficient interaction and communication with society.
- **Helping parents get involved in their children's education:** The Ministry of Education has formed the Parent's Council, which invites mothers and fathers of students to schools in order to discuss all matters relating to their sons and daughters. The Ministry of Education seeks to develop an educational awareness through the Parent's Council in a way that enables parents to assume more responsibilities on their children's education. Schools invite parents to spend the whole day with their children in classes in order to acquaint themselves with their children's school life.
- **Protecting children from any forms of violence, harm, or insults:** The Ministry forbids any form of physical or verbal punishment. The Ministry also asserts the need for teachers to use proper, gentle language and treatment inside and outside the classroom.
- **Curriculums and textbooks:** Through proper curriculums and textbooks, schools teach students general human rights and their rights as students and citizens. These curriculums and textbooks contain concepts related to human rights such as:
 - Political and Civil Rights

- Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights
- Rights to Social Security Systems within the State
- Rights relating to children, women, the elderly, and the people with disabilities.

These rights are taught with great care using appropriate teaching and learning methods. There will be continuous modifications in the curriculums and textbooks to cope with new developments in the field of human rights.

- International Festivals and Cultural Competitions: The Ministry of Education encourages students and members of faculty to celebrate international festivals and organize cultural competitions (such as the International Day of the United Nations, cultural festivals, and festivals of tolerance) that allow students to become acquainted with human rights principles and instruments, and all the rights themselves.
- Privately financed education: In an effort to integrate the whole society into the educational processes, the Ministry of Education offers different opportunities to the private sector to invest and take part in the educational system. The role of privately-financed education is not only confined to regular education, but include also the irregular forms of education such as training centers. Regular education includes Arab Kindergartens, Arab Schools, Foreign Schools, and Schools for Students of Other Nationalities.¹ These schools take into consideration a range of values, goals, and concepts related to human rights. Through policies and educational goals, schools encourage students to practice these principles and values inside and outside the classroom.
- The School Buildings (School Environment): Many school buildings have all the specifications and equipments necessary for proper learning. These schools contain laboratories, multipurpose halls, courts, computers, and canteens. The schools are centrally air conditioned, and provide free transportation to the students. The Committee of Canteen and Water continuously monitor the water stores and the canteens. As prescribed by the Ministry of Education, Ministry of General Health, Ministry of Municipal Affairs, and Ministry of Agriculture, the meals served to the students are ensured to be clean and healthy. Hence, the canteens are kept clean, and cold and clean potable water are continuously supplied to all students.
- Activities and Sports Competitions: The physical and mental health of the students, as well as their entertainment, remain as one of the priorities of the Ministry of Education. For this purpose, many games and tournaments of all kinds of sports are organized in many schools in accordance with the appropriate and well-studied strategy for each age group in all stages of education. The sports include track and field, gymnastics, tennis, football, handball, basketball, and volleyball. A program on teaching children how to swim (from beginners level) has been set up (by governmental and private schools) under the slogan “children swimming literacy.”
- Services and facilities offered to the students: The Ministry of Education offers different services and facilities to the students:
 - Health Services including medication, preventive, and measuring services are made available to all students in all schools in Qatar. Every student has a “Health File” which is managed by the Health Clinic at each school. Moreover, there are female or male nurses at every clinic. The health services offered to the students at school also include diagnosis, follow up treatment, dental health care, and early treatment for many cases such as anemia, physical and mental fitness, and breast cancer for girls. A program called “I Have Grown Up” was initiated to make the female teenager aware of some necessary health matters. Vaccination is also provided at schools in cooperation

with the Ministry of Public Health.

- **Financial Aid and Support:** The Ministry of Education pays great attention to the students who suffer from economic problems. The Ministry of Education annually allocates a budget to help students throughout the year. Financial support, taken out of the profits of the canteens, is provided to all students who are in urgent need of money.

Human rights for people with special needs

The Ministry of Education is very keen in providing various educational services to all citizens. It also pays great attention to that category of citizens with special needs. The Ministry of Education facilitates their comprehensive development to help them break the psychological and social barriers, paving the way for them to be integrated into the society. The Ministry of Education tries to make sure that the members of the society are aware of people with special needs and their important role in participating in society.

This is achieved through the establishment of schools, centers and special institutes that provide care and development programs to citizens with special needs. In accordance with the special law on people with special needs, nine rights are addressed: right to

1. **Education**
2. **Qualification according to ability**
3. **Medical, Psychological, Cultural, and Social Care**
4. **Obtain tools, devices, means of transportation, and equipments which help them in education, qualification, and movement**
5. **Receive relief, aid and other supporting services**
6. **Work in the public and private sectors that suit their capabilities and qualifications**
7. **Engage in sports and entertainment ac-**

ording to their special abilities

8. **Shelter that ensure safe movement**
9. **Use convenient public utilities and ensure their participation in making decisions related to them.**

Article 5 of the same law stipulates that job opportunities should be available for people with special needs. The Supreme Council for Family Affairs is committed to cooperate with the concerned authorities that offer its services and programs to those of special needs in these fields. There is a joint cooperation between the Ministry of Education and the Supreme Council for Family Affairs to provide health services, proposals, and programs that meet the requirements of people with special needs.

The Department of Special Education is affiliated with the management of the Social Education in the Ministry of Education. It commits to providing the services of education and qualification to those with special needs in order to achieve development in its educational, psychological, socials, conversational, and vocational services on the quantitative and qualitative levels. There has been an increase in the number of people with special needs who join schools. In the school year of 2003-2004, Schools of Mental Education had 199 Students with special needs, Schools of Audio Education had 110, and El Noor Institute accommodated 245 students.

As for the curriculum of students with special needs, the Ministry of Education provides curriculums and programs consisting of two-year preparation then six-year vocational training. The Ministry of Education also provides four years for vocational qualification activities such as carpentry, book binding, painting, agriculture, and poetry for boys; sewing, embroidery, and home economics for girls.

Human rights and Student Councils

The Ministry of Education pays great at-

tention to communications inside and outside the school. This is important for raising the awareness of others on different experiences of students. Moreover, sharing and benefiting from these experiences constitute another important goal that the Ministry of Education realizes. Therefore, the Student Councils are considered one of the essential means of communication linking the inside and outside communities of the schools together. The project on Student Councils aim to:

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- Make students become aware of their roles
- Give them opportunities to express their opinions
- Develop their discussion and debate abilities and skills
- Realize the principles of democracy in relation to their rights and know how to demand these rights.

Each school has a Student Council. This council has members elected directly by the students. The tasks are distributed among the members of the council. There are regular meetings attended by the representatives of the council from different schools and educational levels. The problems that the representatives bring to the table are discussed and solved in the meetings. The representatives also organize seasonal meetings with people in key positions in the Ministry of Education to convey their views and needs. Student parliaments are considered to be a kind of Student Council for secondary schools in Qatar. These parliaments play an important role in conveying the opinions of the students to the responsible officials in the Ministry of Education.

The Student Councils are constituted at different levels: class, school, and Ministry of Education. An executive council composed of the responsible officials of the Ministry of Education and student councils is also created.

The Junior Educational Parliament, organized by the Social Committee of the Educational Projects Bank in Primary Schools, aims to practice the concept of democracy among

the students, develop the spirit of citizenship to enable the students to face future challenges, develop student ambitions, and evaluate and predict future changes in the educational system. Parents also have an active role in the activities of this project.

Studies, Researches, Papers, Reports regarding Human Rights

The Ministry produces and coordinates studies, researches, papers, and educational reports concerning human rights. The following have been reported on:

- Introduction of human rights into the primary and secondary school curriculums of Qatari schools
- Introduction of Democracy in the curriculums and textbooks of Qatari schools
- Introduction of concepts and principles of the Red Crescent Organization in the curriculums and textbooks of Qatari schools
- Publication by the Ministry of Education of reports on the following
 - Education pertaining to human rights, democracy, ethical education, and education for international peace
 - The Arab Forum of Education and Human Rights
 - Participation in the conference on education on human rights
- Studies on planning on, and evaluation of, the introduction of concepts of human rights into the Qatari school curriculums.

Local and International Participations Relating to Human Rights

These are some of examples of Qatar participating in local and international events concerning human rights:

- Participation in the discussion of Qatar's first report on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in the

Committee on the Rights of Child (Geneva, Switzerland)

- Participation in a workshop on the introduction of human rights instruments in the curriculums and holding of training sessions for people in the education field
- Participation in a regional workshop with members of the Islamic Education community to consider and discuss the Islamic point of view on human rights in school curriculums
- Represented as a member in the National Committee of Human Rights in Qatar
- Participation in the workshop on disabled people in the Arab World and the International Conference on the Rights of the Disabled (Bahrain)
- Participation in a forum on human rights (Doha, Qatar)
- Participation in a workshop on human rights education in schools in the Gulf States (Doha, Qatar)
- Participation in a workshop on human rights in the school curriculum in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries (Doha, Qatar)
- Annual celebration in schools of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

- Participation in the 17th conference of ‘Female Guides; Our Rights and Responsibilities - A way to a better life’ (Oman)
- Participation in the regional workshop on ‘Education on Human Rights in the Educational Systems in the Arab Gulf States’ (Doha, Qatar)
- Participation in the training workshop on ‘Introducing Human Rights in the Curriculums of Secondary Schools’ (Tunis, Tunisia)
- Participation in the 12th Workshop on Regional Cooperation for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in the Asia-Pacific Region (Doha, Qatar)
- Participation in the training session on the ‘Work Mechanisms of the United Nations’ (Geneva, Switzerland).

Endnote

¹ All natural born Qatari citizens are considered to generally belong to one ethnic group. Other ethnic, religious, and/or linguistic minority groups are considered temporary residential workers from outside the country and enjoy all minority rights during their period of stay in the State of Qatar including the right to education in their native language.