

The National Center for Human Rights and Human Rights Education in Jordan

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The National Center for Human Rights (NCHR) is a national independent institution that enjoys a juridical personality with full financial and administrative independence in undertaking human-rights-related intellectual, political and humanitarian activities. The NCHR formally started operating in 2003. NCHR was established in 2002, but Law No. 51 redefined its powers and functions in 2006. This law, in principle, aims at promotion and protection of human rights and public freedoms in the Kingdom of Jordan through institutional capacity building, and promoting respect for these rights by both the state and society.¹

The mission of the NCHR consists of protecting human rights, disseminating human rights culture, monitoring the human rights situation, providing legal advice and aid for those in need, preparing the necessary administrative and legal measures to minimize if not prevent human-rights violations and their consequences; preparing studies and researches and providing information, convening training panels and sessions, mounting campaigns, taking positions on certain issues; issuing statements and publications and reports.

The NCHR strives to achieve the following objectives:

1. Protection of human rights and freedoms in the Kingdom.
2. Dissemination and promotion of human rights principles in the Kingdom by drawing on the tolerant message of Islam, the values of the Islamic and Arab heritage, the rights enshrined in the Constitution, and the principles stipu-

lated in the international covenants and charters.

3. Application of the human rights principles at the intellectual and practical levels, and promotion of non-discrimination among the citizens based on race, language, religion or gender.
4. Enhancement of the democratic process in the Kingdom by protecting freedoms, guaranteeing political pluralism, respecting the sovereignty of the law, and guaranteeing the right to economic, social and cultural development.
5. Keeping track of the developments in human-rights-related national legislations and making proposals to ensure that they are consistent with international human rights standards and instruments to which Jordan is committed.
6. Striving to make Jordan join the human-rights-related Arab and international charters and agreements.

The activities of the NCHR and the implementation of its policies are entrusted to a Commissioner General who is appointed by the Council of Ministers, upon the recommendation of the Board of Trustees of NCHR. The decision on the appointment of the Commissioner General is subsequently embodied in a Royal Decree.

The NCHR works to realize its goals and carry out its human-rights-related activities through the following units:

- a. The Complaints and Legal Services Unit - It receives complaints of human rights violations from any person in Jordan, and seeks to eliminate these violations in cooperation with the government authorities.
- b. The Reform and Rehabilitation Centers Unit - It monitors the situation of inmates and prisoners in the reform and rehabilitation centers in Jordan, and seeks to address any violation of their human rights.
- c. Research and Documentation Unit - It undertakes legal and analytical studies on human rights. This Unit relates to an office in the NCHR that coordinates international projects and links, and another office that looks after the protection of the rights of the child, persons with disabilities, and the elderly.
- d. Advocacy and Training Unit - It works on the development of the human rights concept and on increasing public awareness of human rights through its national human rights awareness programs. It supports the teaching of human rights principles, the enhancement of the human rights concepts as well as the exercise of these rights, the adoption of specialized training programs to educate various professional groups on these rights. It aims to achieve the following objectives:
 1. To develop the training skills and capacities of the members of the Unit and other NCHR staff regarding appropri-

ate ways of communicating with the targeted sectors in society.

2. To acquire human-rights-related professional skills that suit formal and non-formal education activities through various forms of training.
3. To increase public awareness on human rights through panel discussions, lectures, and distribution of printed and audio-visual materials.

Human Rights Education

The NCHR puts special importance to human rights education at the formal and non-formal levels. Human rights education is one of the seven components of NCHR's Strategic Plan for 2005-2008.

For the non-formal education activities, the NCHR held several training sessions for targeted groups such as judges, lawyers, police officials, parliamentarians, and media people. It is developing its role as a catalyst and facilitator for capacity-building of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the field of human rights. It has already built a network with the local human rights NGOs in an effort to co-ordinate, synchronize, and support the on-going initiatives of civil society organizations working in the field. These NGOs now look to the NCHR for more support.^b

The NCHR has already initiated community-based programs covering the different regions of the country. It has implemented many programs that address basic human rights issues and raise awareness regarding the main international human rights instruments that Jordan has ratified. Furthermore, it is committed to having its activities under media coverage in order to reach a larger segment of the Jordanian population. To implement its strategic plan, it aims to develop an effective and efficient media strategy and to produce media resources aimed at promoting both general and specific human rights issues.

In addition to the NCHR Strategic Plan for the years 2005-2008, human rights education in the formal education system is also provided in the new Strategic Plan for the years 2009-2011.

In the 2005-2008 Strategic Plan, human rights education is the first among the seven major components. The human rights education component has the main objective of integrating human rights concepts into school and higher education curriculums. This component thus focuses on the educational curriculums, their development in conformity with the international standards, and human rights concepts integration into the primary, secondary, and university curriculums.

This component has the following sub-objectives:

1. To analyze the content of the educational curriculums
2. To identify the contents and suitable means for incorporating human rights concepts into the educational curriculums
3. To evaluate the impact of educational output of human rights education in the Jordanian society
4. To raise the awareness of decision-makers, teachers, education officials, and the public on the importance of integrating human rights concepts and principles in the educational curriculums.

The activities to be undertaken are the following:

1. A survey to analyze human rights concepts in the primary and secondary curriculums, and identify contents and methods necessary for integrating human rights concepts into the curriculums in accordance with international standards.
2. A pre- and post-implementation survey targeting a sizable representative sample of students.

3. Three panel discussions with decision-makers (parliamentarians, education officials, and officials of the Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Political Development, Ministry of Higher Education).
4. Two training of trainers' (TOT) workshops to prepare forty trainers from the Ministry of Education.
5. Working meetings (at least two) for people from the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education for the purposes of identifying mechanisms for the implementation of the study results.
6. Three televised seminars on implementing the integration of human rights concept into the educational curriculums.

The activities are meant for the relevant education officials, teachers, students, school head masters, and education advisors.

The following are the sub-objectives:

1. To form a steering committee and another technical committee that represents major partners to lay down the work agenda.
2. To identify concepts and educational values that are inconsistent with human rights principles and are still embodied in school curriculums.
3. To formulate suggestions and recommendations indicating which programs should be used for the purposes of integrating human rights concepts into the curriculums.
4. To make decision-makers and educational authorities commit to the compliance with the national action plan on the integration of human rights concepts into educational curriculums.

The NCHR, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Instruction, began to complete the work that the Ministry has begun several years ago in integrating the concepts

of human rights into the school curriculums. A training session was held for the staff of the curriculum and training departments of the Ministry to build the capacity in integrating the human rights concepts into the school curriculums.

The NCHR has also followed-up on the efforts of the Ministry of Education and Instruction in establishing the National Committee for Human Rights Education, which is composed of the following government bodies: the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, the Ministry of Political Development, the Ministry of Islamic Trust, Affairs and Holy Places, the Ministry of Culture, and the Higher Council on Youth. The NCHR representative in the National Committee acts in the capacity of liaison officer. An ambitious national plan on human rights education for the years 2008-2011 was prepared in compliance with the United Nations General Assembly resolution on the United Nations World Programme for Human Rights Education (WPHRE).

In support of the First Phase Plan of Action of the WPHRE, the NCHR prepared a study of the current situation of human rights education in the Jordanian schools system. The study enumerated the achievements in the area of teaching human rights, and the most important challenges and deficiencies.

The annual report of the NCHR contains a section on human rights education in the schools and universities. It contains several points relating to the teaching of human rights and the recommendations to improve the quality of education and the infrastructure of schools that will contribute to the enhancement of the teaching of human rights.

The Fourth Annual Report - *Situation of Human rights in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan* (2007) has the following update:⁴

The concepts of [human rights have been integrated into the] school curricula had been [integrated], particularly the rights of both the

child and the woman. This covered all classes in more than one subject either in the form of direct lessons specialized in human rights or in the form student activities. Gender concepts related to the role of men and women have also been boosted in school curricula, thus enabling students to participate in evaluating curricula and textbooks. An electronic mail has been issued under the name "The Student Mission" to enable students to express their views.

The NCHR appreciates the efforts made by the Ministry [of Education] to include the teaching of human rights in its curricula. We wish to stress the need to go ahead with these efforts and of working towards developing them. It further stresses the need to pay special attention to the necessity of training teachers on human rights concepts.

In the same report, the NCHR noted the continuing occurrence of violence in school among students and between students and teachers despite the existence of a hotline regarding complaints on such violence and a project to protect students from abuse. The NCHR recommended to the Ministry of Education and Instruction to activate the follow-up and monitoring procedures in cooperation with it and other institutions (such as the Family Protection Department/Public Security and the National Council for Family Affairs) and the enhancement of human rights culture in the schools.⁵

The NCHR has held several education-related sessions, one of which dealt with higher education and human rights. One of its recommendations stressed the necessity of teaching human rights and democracy through a special course to the students or integrating this into the major courses.

The NCHR is looking forward to working alongside the Ministry of Education and Instruction in the implementation of the national action plan on human rights education that contains several activities revolving around the following themes:

1. Follow up on the integration of human rights concepts into the curriculums by examining the overall framework of the curriculums and textbooks, comparing the results of this examination with the international human rights standards and the matrix of the concepts of human rights and the culture of peace, and the common universal values that was prepared by the Ministry of Education and Instruction, holding awareness workshops for the members of the curriculum development committee regarding the concepts of human rights, survey of students and teachers and presentation of the survey results to experts and arbitrators, preparation of teaching activities to be introduced to the secondary school textbooks.
2. Training of the staff of the Ministry of Education and Instruction on human rights especially by implementing the human rights training of trainers program. The activities can include training of forty field trainers on teaching human rights, preparation of training manuals, and a session regarding the right to education for the officials of the Ministry of Education and Instruction and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research.
3. Continued organizing of current extracurricular activities on human rights such as competitions, camps, poster-making, and establishment of human rights clubs. NHRC also proposes the establishment of special human-rights-related clubs in the schools like:
 - Information clubs/internet to connect with students all over the world, exchange ideas with them, acquainting them with human rights in general, or those relating to specific categories (women, children and persons with disabilities).
 - Environment-care clubs that help the students exercise their right to live in a healthy environment and preserve the same.

- Clubs that collect human-rights-related documents, hold panel discussions, give lectures, and distribute publications, etc.
4. Educational information: television panel discussions regarding the integration of the concepts of human rights into the school textbooks.

As for the other sectors, the NCHR is also looking for ways to cover important categories in the society outside the formal education system, like the young people, Islamic scholars and preachers, civil society, and the government ministries that deal with education, culture, information, and teaching materials.

The NCHR and the Ministry of Education and Instruction will sign a memorandum of understanding to implement the national action plan, while both sides will look for foreign funding in order to execute it.

As for non-formal education, the NCHR has held since the start of its operations various sessions, panel discussions, studies, and training guidelines that benefited thousands of Jordanians and Arabs from the various Ministries, personnel of security departments, judges, teachers, university students, and NGO workers. The most important projects that were implemented focused on the following:

- The refugees and human rights
- Non-governmental organizations capacity building
- Enhancement of justice for the judges and Islamic sharia judges
- University students and violence against women
- Civil and political rights for university students
- Trainers training for the employees of the Higher Council of Youth
- Good governance and human rights for the young
- Opportunity for all persons with disabilities

- The right to a healthy environment
- Preparation of shadow report regarding the fulfillment of state obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In conclusion, the NCHR stresses that human rights education is a national cause that needs the efforts of all. It is an important and a continuous work for the enhancement of human rights in Jordan. It transforms the application of human rights from the path of protection towards that of prevention.

Endnotes

¹ Introduction of the NCHR Strategic Plan (2005-2008) available in http://www.nchr.org.jo/pages.php?menu_id=19&local_type=0&local_id=0&local_details=0&local_details1=0&localsite_branchname=NCHR

² Shaher Bak, APF Member Reports – Jordan, 10th Annual Meeting of the Asia-Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (APF), Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, 24-26 August 2005.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Page 79 of the report.

⁵ Ibid.