

REPORT

Workshop on Human Rights, Teaching Methods, and Organization Management

Beirut, Lebanon
Gefinor Rotana Hotel
June 28 – July 2, 2006

Background

This workshop was developed by the education program as part of its ongoing efforts to establish and strengthen in Iraq academic centers of conflict resolution, inter-ethnic and inter-religious dialogue, and human rights and democracy promotion. This effort is helping these nascent university centers become key capacity building centers through 1) outreach to the university and the wider local community, 2) educational leadership that includes new curriculum development and new pedagogical tools, and 3) research and scholarship, supported by an on-site library.

The participants felt strongly that embedding human rights education in higher education was crucial at this time, particularly in light of rising violence and intolerance in Iraq. There was a strong consensus that Iraqi universities can play a significant role both in promoting human rights and fulfilling a strong need for public education about rights and responsibilities, clarifying the distinctions between individual and group rights, and teaching that rights are as important at the personal, family, community, and university levels as they were at the national and international levels.

The specific objectives of the workshop were:

1. To broaden Iraqi academics' understanding of human rights (theory, historical development, documents, legal instruments, political applications, and scope) and to develop a common understanding of human rights;
2. To help them understand the relationship of human rights to conflict resolution and civil society development.
3. To initiate the development of human rights curricula for Iraqi higher education and Iraqi teaching programs
4. To strengthen the working relationships and networks we have helped to build among different key universities and personnel and to assist many interested faculty members in learning how to write grant proposals and contact donor agencies and organizations.

The workshop in Beirut grew out of a workshop we held in Jordan last year on conflict resolution, teaching methodologies that are student-centered and related to conflict

resolution, democracy and human rights, and small group management. The June 2006 workshop was requested by our Iraqi partners, especially the University of Baghdad-based Educational Unit for Peace Studies and Human Rights. It was organized to serve as an intensive educational tool for the personnel and principals of the Unit and a group of other academics from different universities and representatives from the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MHESR).

The Meetings

This five-day workshop was organized around three specific issues: the theory of human rights, methods of teaching the subject, and small organization management. The conceptual sessions discussed the field in general and its application internationally, regionally, and internally. It also explored relationships between human rights and conflict resolution, and human rights and civil society development. Iraqi participants from the Universities of Baghdad, al-Mustansiriyya, al-Anbar, Thi Qar, and Basra reported on their efforts to establish university centers for peace studies, conflict resolution, or human rights.

Breakout sessions of groups assigned on the first day discussed issues related to the teaching of human rights at the university level in Iraq. The three groups reported findings, problems, and recommendations. Their summary is appended to this report. They were also tasked with developing a basic human rights curriculum that would be available for introductory courses in human rights and could be built upon and expanded as professors, departments and universities begin to expand the focus and course offerings in human rights.

The resource faculty included: Imad harb, Jeff Helsing, Linda Bishai, Irma Ghosn (education professor at the Lebanese American University), Nabil Daher (education professor at Lebanese University), Afifa Arsanios (teacher trainer), and Lina Alamuddine (programs specialist at NDI, Lebanon). We also had an Arab human rights campaigner (who happened to be Iraqi) come for a lunchtime lecture on human rights in the contemporary Arab context.

The participants heard presentations about successful and acclaimed Lebanese efforts to develop courses on human rights and related matters. They also visited a Lebanese civil society organization, SOS International, that has established a children's village in the Beqaa Valley in Lebanon which we visited as a field trip. The Iraqi participants were very impressed and agreed that its experience should be duplicated in Iraq. SOS International is a social, non-profit organization that cares for children's rights and provides shelter, educational, and social services to parentless children. Its main aim is to address the problem of child abandonment and works on ensuring a family environment for boys and girls.

The management section concentrated on training the participants on networking and grant proposal writing, two invaluable skills in building and leading centers that become integral parts of a university as well as the local community. Linda Bishai and Jeff

Helsing both led interactive and elicitive sessions on best practices (American as well as international) in teaching about human rights as well as related the teaching and promotion of human rights to the teaching and promotion of conflict resolution.

The atmosphere at the workshop was very open and relaxed. Participants were forthcoming with opinions and recommendations. Since this was a continuation of the effort of last year (except that some participants were new), participants tried to always link the subjects of conflict resolution and human rights in an academic way that truly enriched the whole effort. Additionally, the political undertones of the American occupation of Iraq that were apparent last year (when some participants expressed dislike to American policy) were almost completely absent this time around. The feeling throughout the week was one of cooperation and readiness to participate in the overall mission of helping the Iraqi higher education sector.

Results and Next Steps

The workshop produced the following results:

1. A commitment on the part of personnel from four different universities to establish university centers for the promotion of conflict resolution, human rights, and dialogue, in addition to enhancing the already-established Unit for Peace Studies at the University of Baghdad. Faculty from the Universities of Basra, al-Mustansiriyya, al-Anbar, and Thi Qar presented preliminary plans for future action on centers and we promised continued support.
2. The participants decided to collaborate on plans to connect different campuses in a network for the study of human rights across years of study. Iraqi first-year students are already required to pass human rights electives and the participants decided to work toward making the field a required in all years of study. What helps this decision is that two of the participants have already produced human rights textbooks commissioned by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and expanding the field is something they are enthusiastic about.
3. It was encouraging that the participants decided to assist in introducing the topic to K-12 education. In breakout sessions, they analyzed what the topics of rights should be according to age groups, discussed the problems facing teaching the field, and suggested mechanisms for overcoming administrative and bureaucratic obstacles (see below).
4. Participants established close relations with practitioners in Beirut. One lunchtime guest lecturer who has been a longtime human rights activist promised to work on a partnership between USIP and the Tunis-based Arab Human Rights Organization to hold workshops and seminars for Iraqi professors on the subject in Jordan or Tunisia. Participants also paid a visit to the Beirut-based Center for

Arab Unity Studies where they met with its Director and were provided with a collections of books and periodicals on general Iraqi topics

5. Participants established close relations with Lina Alamuddine from NDI who promised to assist them with organizational and management questions via email in their efforts to establish their university centers. Importantly, they learned how to apply for funding from outside sources. Information finally was clear that individual university entities are allowed to apply for alternative funding (which was believed to be prohibited by Iraqi law).

Appendix

Summary of Small Group Meetings on Human Rights Education

In breakout sessions, the participants discussed what they saw as necessary units for teaching human rights to different age groups, the problems facing teaching the field, and ways of overcoming the administrative and pedagogical problems in the higher education sector.

They linked the recommended topics to be included in the curriculum to students' developmental stages. For children aged 6 to 11, they recommended teaching love, respect, cooperation, and cleanliness; for those 12-14, they recommended citizenship development, religion and religious belief, women's issues, and the environment; and for those 14 and older, they recommended an emphasis on the concepts, practices, and covenants of human rights.

They decided that addressing the inadequacies in the curriculum and in the administrative infrastructure should be accomplished through the centers they are keen to establish. They identified their most important need to be a combination of institutional development, teacher education, and curriculum materials acquisition. The university vice-presidents and the deans saw that they can exercise due pressure and establish better connections to the Ministry of Higher Education in order to more effectively address the inadequacies in the quality of the teaching staff, libraries, and reform efforts. All participants, however, saw that the faculties of law and political science, specifically the former, should be given an important role in developing the new environment for teaching the field.

All, obviously, complained of the security situation as the single most important impediment to more effective curriculum and teaching changes.