

ISSUE 1 - January 2014 - June 2014

# NEWSLETTER

United Nations Human Rights - Regional Office for the Middle East

---



## Message from the Regional Representative Abdel Salam Sidahmed

Dear friends,

I am pleased to launch this first semi-annual Newsletter of the Regional Office for the Middle East, to give you our news and encourage you to participate in the important efforts being made across the Middle East to move the human rights agenda forward.

In my first year as Regional Representative for the Regional Office of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, I witnessed, in 2013, the twentieth anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and the establish-

ment of the High Commissioner's mandate "to promote and protect the enjoyment and full realization, by all people, of all rights established in the Charter of the United Nations and in international human rights laws and treaties". Today, in this part of the world, the task of protecting and promoting human rights is as vital as ever.

Yet it takes a long time to effect change. Progress in the human rights arena in particular requires long-term strategies, persistent work, attention to detail, and

much, much patience. Human rights must be protected by law, enforced by the institutions of State, and supported by a pervasive human rights culture in society at large. Through our presence in the Middle East and North Africa, the Regional Office reaches out to various actors in member states, including governmental institutions, NHRIs and civil society to support their efforts in advancing the human rights agenda. This newsletter highlights some of our activities in the region during the past period.



## Our work with Civil Society Organizations

Cooperation with civil society remains a strategic priority in our pursuit to promote and protect human rights in the region. In particular, the Regional Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Middle East and North Africa in Beirut, like other OHCHR field presences elsewhere, builds on its network of human rights defenders in the region and active civil society organizations to better understand the human rights situation. The Regional Office is also keen to encourage active engagement by civil society actors with the UN human rights mechanisms. For example, the Regional Office contributed and co-

organized, in partnership with civil society organizations, several training programs on interaction with and reporting to human rights mechanisms over the last six months.

In February, the Regional Office contributed to a training program for Civil Society Organizations in Lebanon on “victim identification and protection”. The training was part of the “Action to Protect and Assist Vulnerable and Exploited Migrant Workers in the Middle East and North Africa (PAVE)”, a regional program that is being implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Also in February, at the request of

A training for Civil Society on international mechanisms for the protection of human rights - Kuwait, April 2014.



A training on international human rights mechanisms for online human rights defenders in the Arab region - Beirut, May 2014.

the Bahraini Lualua Centre for Human Rights, the Regional Office conducted a training programme on charter-based human rights mechanisms (e.g. Special Procedures) for a group of 17 Bahraini and Kuwaiti Civil Society representatives in Beirut.

The Regional Office also held two training workshops in Jordan and Kuwait targeting civil society actors on international mechanisms for the protection of human rights. The training in Kuwait, organized in April in cooperation with the Gulf Civil Society Associations Forum (GCASF), targeted Kuwaiti and other Civil Society representatives and actors from the Gulf

Region. The training in Jordan (also in April) was organized with the aim of enhancing civil society organizations' response to the country's Second Universal Periodic Review, which was completed in October 2013. Both these training programs incorporated a women's rights focus and included sessions that discussed particular mechanisms that relate to women's rights, for example the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice.

“This knowledge will provide civil society actors with tools to enhance human rights situation in their countries. A dynamic, knowledgeable, diverse and independent civil society, able to operate freely and human-rights savvy, is a key element in securing sustainable human rights protection in the Middle East and North Africa as well as in all the regions of the world.”

Abdel Salam Sidahmed  
Regional Representative,  
Middle East and North Africa

## Interview with KHADIJA RIYADI

Youths in the region called the Arab World, which is of course a region where different populations other than Arabs coexist, have proven in recent years that they are capable of playing their full role in the change. Unfortunately, things have taken a dramatic turn in certain countries, exacerbated by super powers and their policies, which contradict the UN charter.

The youths, the majority in this region, can play an important role to move the situation forward in their countries. Thus, young

human rights defenders are called upon to lead the fight for peace and respect of liberties and good governance, and against religious extremism and despotism. This might seem a mission impossible, considering the complexity of the current situation in the region and the manipulation of media giants, but it is actually possible, especially that the youths were able to counter all these difficulties thanks to their convictions, first and foremost, but also to the new means of communication that they master fully. In fact, social media and the internet in general

have played an important role in mobilizing and organizing solidarity action. Young defenders are called upon to use these means to disseminate human rights values among youths in general, but also to raise awareness on regional and international norms and mechanisms useful in promoting peace and development in our countries.

[Extracts from an interview with Ms. Khadija Riyadi, Awarded 2013 United Nations Human Rights Prize](#)



## Our work with National Human Rights Institutions and other Regional and National Entities

With regard to our work with NHRIs and other regional or national entities, the Regional Office co-organized in collaboration with the League of Arab States the first regional conference on human rights in the Arab Region. The central issue of the conference, which was held in Cairo, was the development of a regional human rights strategy. The two-day conference, with the theme, “Human Rights in the Arab Region: Challenges and the Way Forward,” brought together government representatives, National Human Rights Institutions and Arab Civil Society Organiza-

tions and from now on will be held every two years.

National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) that comply with the principles relating to the status of national institutions, commonly known as the Paris Principles, play a crucial role in promoting and monitoring the effective implementation of international human rights standards at the national level, a role which is increasingly recognized by the international community. The Regional Office, with the collaboration of its Geneva-based National Institutions and Regional Mechanisms Section (NIRMS), sup-

ports the establishment and strengthening of NHRIs in the Middle East and North Africa.

In May, the Regional Office organized a training program for Oman’s Human Rights Commission (NHRC) aimed at supporting its efforts to monitor and protect human rights. The training focused on one of the NHRIs’ key functions: receiving, investigating and documenting individual complaints by citizens. The training was held in cooperation with the Independent Commission for Human Rights Commission in Palestine (ICHR).

Cognizant of the need to ensure the

promotion and protection of women’s rights as an integral aspect of NHRIs’ work, utilizing CEDAW as the guiding framework, the Regional Office organized in January, in co-operation with UN Women, a workshop on national action plans on the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. The workshop was the third in a series of workshops previously undertaken by the Regional Office to enhance the co-operation between National Human Rights Institutions, National Women Machineries and Civil Society organizations. The workshop was

Abdel Salam Sidahmed and Nabil Elaraby, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, at the first regional conference on human rights in the Arab Region - Cairo, May 2014.



“One of the reasons that made this training a big success was that, in a country where most of the activities are segregated such as Saudi Arabia, it was attended by both men and women, out of our firm belief that men play a key role in a woman’s accession to her full rights.”

Ahmad Al-Yahia  
Saudi Human Rights Commission

held in Amman, gathering participants from Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, Oman, Palestine, Qatar and Iraq.

As part of a larger framework of cooperation between OHCHR and the Human Rights Commission in Saudi Arabia, the Regional Office contributed to a series of training programs that were organized to support the Human Rights Commission in its various operations and in line with Paris Principles. In addition, the Regional Office led a training program in Riyadh on re-

porting to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

The event was shortly followed by another training on trafficking in persons, organised by UN Human Rights Training Centre, based in Doha, aimed at building the capacity of law enforcement officials, including police members, border guards, etc..., in addition to participants from the Standing Committee to combat trafficking crimes. The training introduced practical forms of combatting trafficking in persons

in the Kingdom, in alignment with national legislation and international obligations.

As the lead entity within the United Nations system in the area of transitional justice, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, both through its headquarters and field presences, has been instrumental in developing standards and operational rule of law tools on transitional justice mechanisms. In the Middle East and North Africa, the Regional Office has been engaged in programs to identify, sup-

port and empower domestic reform constituencies in States in transition. In this regard, the Regional Office continued to provide support to the National Human Rights Council (NHRC) in Egypt and offered its technical assistance to enhance the Council’s role in transition in accordance with the Paris Principles.

In recent years, the regional office has enhanced its cooperation with National Women Machineries, which are entrusted at the national level to advance women’s rights. To that end, in February, the Regional Office com-

menced the second stage of its advanced training on gender concepts and gender mainstreaming tools, in co-operation with the National Lebanese Commission for Women (NCLW). The first stage of this training program consisted of six training sessions which took place between October and November 2013. The subjects covered included key gender concepts, analytical frameworks, gender and development, organizational analysis, gender responsive budgeting and international human rights frameworks.



A training on gender concepts and gender mainstreaming tools, in cooperation with the NCLW – Beirut, February 2014.

## SYRIA in focus

Since the on-set of the Syrian conflict, the Regional Office contributed to the Secretary General of the United Nations' monthly Reports on the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 2139 relating to the humanitarian situation in Syria. The Regional Office also commissioned a regional study on "Advancing Human Rights of Refugees from Syria in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey", which examined protection issues faced by Refugees fleeing Syria. Similarly, the Regional Office, contributed extensively to thematic reports that were issued by The U.N. Human Rights Office on: "Living

under siege" (19 February), "Open Wounds – Torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic" (14 April) and «Surrounded by Death»: Former Inmates of Aleppo Central Prison.

The pdf files for papers – available only in English- can be found on the following links:

<http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/SY/LivingUnderSiege.pdf>

<http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/SY/PaperOnTorture.pdf>

<http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/SY/AleppoCentralPrison.pdf>

The iconic image of a huge crowd waiting for UNRWA food parcels in the Palestinian refugee camp of Yarmouk, Damascus - March 2014.



## Regional Office Expertise and Contribution

Within the frame of a regional seminar on “Accountability in International Law: National Experiences,” expert staff from the Regional Office delivered a presentation on International Criminal Law and the International Criminal Court. The seminar was organized by Al-Haq, an independent Palestinian non-governmental Human Rights organization.

Similarly, the Regional Office participated in the “Third Forum for Media Freedom Defenders,” and contributed in a panel discussion on hate speech in the Middle East. The

discussion focused on the situation in the Arab Region and sought to promote the U.N. Human Rights Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.

In the same vein, The Regional Office recently contributed to a specialized training course, offering media professionals from MENA the opportunity to express their at times divergent views about media coverage of human rights in the region.

From a specialized training course on Human Rights-Based Approach to media coverage - Morocco, May 2014.



For comments and to request further information on the work of the Regional Office for the Middle East as mentioned in this issue, write to [jchahine@ohchr.org](mailto:jchahine@ohchr.org).



UNITED NATIONS  
**HUMAN RIGHTS**  
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER