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for  
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# Greetings from ACHRS

Marhaba, ahlen wa sahlen to the latest edition of the ACHRS Quarterly Newsletter.

In spite of Ramadan, summer holidays and the heat of Amman, it has been another busy period in the life of the center of late, and we look forward to having the chance to tell you about our activities in the next few pages.

As we hope you will see, the last three months saw ACHRS develop its expertise in several areas, whilst maintaining its core focus.

Women's rights maintained its position as a primary area of ACHRS activity, with both the 7th 'Training of Trainers' session on women's rights, and the EMHRN-ACHRS training course on gender.

Elsewhere, ACHRS built upon the success of earlier training courses on parallel report writing, and delivered a course to participants from organizations such as Amnesty International and the Arab Women's Organization, which focused on refining the necessary skills for parallel reporting writing in human rights in general.

As well as exciting new opportunities, the summer months also brought both new challenges to ACHRS. The amendment to the Association Law that the Jordanian government passed in July presents a number of obstacles to the valuable work conducted by Jordan's NGOs and human rights groups. ACHRS has expressed its concern that the amended law could effectively be used to close organizations working for refugees or on human rights, on the grounds that these topics are under the remit of the government. ACHRS and EMHRN met with EU representatives to discuss their reservations with the Association Law amendments.

In other news, ACHRS has been increasing its media profile, and over the summer welcomed a team from the Al-Jazeera news network. An interview with Center Director Dr Nizam Assaf will be broadcast later this year.

As ever, ACHRS are looking forward to the opportunities the rest of the year will present, and will share our progress in the next newsletter.

Many thanks for reading and salaama.





## 7th Training of Trainers on Women's Rights Gets Underway

The first phase of the seventh 'training of trainers' (ToT) course on women's rights was held from 5-16 August, 2008 at the Jerusalem Hotel in Amman. Twenty-three human rights activists, from six Arab countries (Jordan, Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and Yemen) participated in the course. Part one of the course raised awareness of women's rights issues and laws, and also helped the participants to hone and evaluate their presentation skills.

The 'training for trainers' course aims to disseminate knowledge of women's rights across the region, and involved presentations on women's rights issues relevant to the MENA region. 'Training of trainers' was made possible through funding kindly made available by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The 2<sup>nd</sup> session, which will see participants delivering their own presentations to members of the public, is scheduled for the end of November.



*Above: Imad-Eddine Mesdoua makes his presentation as part of ACHRS' 7th ToT course*

*Below: A group photo taken on the Writing Parallel Reports course*



## Training Course in Writing Parallel Human Rights Reports A Success

ACHRS, in conjunction with the HABITAT Housing and Land Rights Network, recently completed a 2nd training course on writing parallel reports of human rights. 17 participants from ACHRS, the Arab Women's Organization, the Arab Organization for Human Rights (Jordan), Amnesty International and the Jordanian Society for Human Rights took part in the training, which focused on the charter laid down by the International Convention on Economic Social and Cultural Rights.

This session was led by Dr. Josef Schachla and Rabie Wabba from HABITAT. The first session, held from 5th to 8th June, dealt with refining skills for writing reports for submission to the UPR. The most recent session, which ran from 28th to 31st August, focused on refining the skills necessary to write parallel reports on human rights in general.



## Second Training Session for the Staff of the Jordanian House of Representatives

The training session on human rights for the employees of the Jordanian House of Representatives, organized by ACHRS in collaboration with the General Secretariat of the House of Representatives, was held on the 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> August 2008. The session was held under the patronage of House of Representatives Speaker, engineer Abdul Hadi El Majali.

Dr. Muhammad El Tarawneh, member of the scientific council of ACHRS, discussed the role of parliament and the judiciary in consolidating human rights through the upgrading of legislation in line with the international agreements to which Jordan acceded in the area of human rights in the fashion that would comply with the international agreements in the control and accountability of the executive branch of government.

Other training included Mrs. Lina Qurah discussing the CEDAW, and journalist Yahya Shuqayr discussing the role of the media in the consolidation of human rights with a focus on the right of the freedom of opinion, the freedom of expression, the acquisition of information, and the importance of the role of journalists in influencing national legislation to guarantee these rights. In the last session, Attorney Salim Qubailat discussed the international mechanisms for the protection of human rights, which included the UPR and the treaty and no treaty obligations

At the end of the training session, certificates were handed over to the 23 male and female participants. Dr. Muhammad El Tarawneh made a

speech asserting that this training session was part of the context of the interaction of the Jordanian House of Representatives with the civil society organizations.

*Below: The participants hard at work on the House of Representatives course*

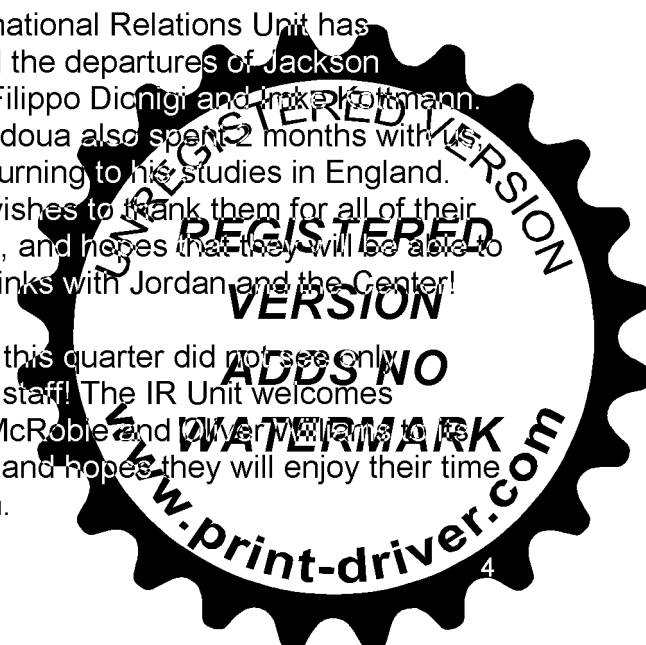


## ACHRS Staff Changes

ACHRS bid goodbye to Suhair Sweiss, who left the Center for employment at the Jordanian Parliament in September. At the end of September, Jena Shmuel left the Center after 4 years in Amman to start her new life in Australia. ACHRS wishes both of them every success in the future.

The International Relations Unit has witnessed the departures of Jackson Oldfield, Filippo Dignigi and Inke Kottmann. Imad Mesdoua also spent 2 months with us before returning to his studies in England. ACHRS wishes to thank them for all of their hard work, and hopes that they will be able to maintain links with Jordan and the Center!

However, this quarter did not see only departing staff! The IR Unit welcomes Heather McRobie and Oliver Williams to its numbers, and hopes they will enjoy their time in Amman.



## EMHRN-ACHRS Training Course on Gender

On 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> July 2008 ACHRS, in co-operation with the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network, held a training course on Gender at the ACHRS offices. The course was attended by 18 participants, including ACHRS staff and other citizens from various areas of civil society. The participants studied Gender Mainstreaming practices and policies, as well as women's rights issues across the MENA region.

The training focused on the role of human rights organisations in protecting and promoting gender equality, and taught participants about the conceptual framework that governs GM, as well as the relevant instruments and tools of the discourse.

Thereafter, ACHRS was able to adopt GM practices in its operating procedures, and ensure that it is considered in all future training courses and other events.

The training was led by EMHRN's Gender Coordinator in Jordan, Lina Alqurah. It is hoped that future sessions can be convened, to help spread the knowledge of important GM practices across Jordan and the MENA Region. This training comes in scope of the EMHRN efforts related to Building capacities of the Network members pertaining to Gender Equality and Gender Mainstreaming and the restructuring of Amman Center for Human Rights Studies.

## Visitors to the Center

It has also been a busy period in terms of visits to the Center. On August 18<sup>th</sup>, the Center received a delegation from the British Embassy in Amman. The four-person team spoke with Dr. Nizam and members of the IR Unit on the Human Rights situation in Jordan, and on the Memorandum signed by the British and Jordanian governments that allows for the deportation of prisoners involved in terrorist activities back to Jordan.

On 17<sup>th</sup> September, Jim Downing and Mia Gröndahl from the Institute for Further Education of Journalists (FOJO), Sweden, visited the Center to speak with Dr. Nizam on their upcoming project in the MENA region. FOJO are seeking to strengthen the quality of journalism in the Middle East, and also wish to deliver more training to journalists in different countries in the region. ACHRS will assist FOJO in this,

and look forward to working with them.

On 7<sup>th</sup> October, Dr. Nizam and Oliver Williams met with Arwa Al-Khatib and Ruba Maternah of MEPI to discuss the approval of the ACHRS project to promote the Freedom of Information Act.

The project has been approved, and ACHRS will work to publish legislation in the Act. It also convene a panel of lawyers, journalists and other members of civil society to discuss the law and potential changes to it.

A team from the Al-Jazeera news channel was also welcomed by the Center. They sat with Dr. Nizam and filmed a short interview, wherein various human rights issues were discussed. Look out for his appearance on TV screens around the world soon!





## ACHRS-EMHRN Delegation Meets with European Union Representatives to Discuss Changes on Association Law

On 30<sup>th</sup> August, Dr. Nizam and Imke Kottmann of ACHRS, along with Kamel Jendoubi (EMHRN President) and EMHRN staff members Lina Alqurah, Anne-Sophie Schaeffer traveled to the EU Delegation in Jordan HQ. They met with Christophe Katsahian (French Embassy), Claus Heiberg (EU Councilor) and Emilie Larese of the EU Delegation in Jordan to discuss the proposed changes to the Jordanian Association Law, and the subsequent impact on Jordanian NGOs and CSOs.

The meetings also focused on the necessity for the EC Delegation to raise awareness of Jordan-EU relations among the civil society and to activate the Framework of Action adopted at the Euro-Mediterranean ministerial conference "strengthening the role of women in the society", which enhance the promotion of gender equality and women rights. A meeting was then organized with International NGOs and funding agencies operating in Jordan in order to share common concerns.

The Association Law that the Jordanian government passed in June/July 2008 makes it nigh-on impossible for many NGOs to continue the valuable work in which they are currently engaged. The changes to the law effectively mean that NGOs in Jordan become extensions of the government. For example, Article 3 of the law states that NGOs should be prohibited from "pursuing objectives that are part of the domain of political parties." Thus, it could be argued that NGOs could be banned from working on human rights issues or refugee problems, as they could be interpreted as being issues in the domain of the government. In fact, this ruling could be extended to cover many more issues; the government would effectively have the power to prohibit NGOs from engaging in any activity that the

government does not approve of.

Another troubling amendment would see the Jordanian government having direct control over the funding of many NGOs in Jordan. It is proposed that an NGO would need direct government approval for funding that it receives from organizations based abroad. This could mean that the Jordanian government could effectively apply a stranglehold to any of many organizations that currently operate in Jordan. Such a move would dramatically inhibit the freedom of many organizations, as they would have to consider whether or not their activities could precipitate an end to their funding. Infringements on this law would carry a minimum three-month prison sentence.

Furthermore, the new legislation would allow for the imposition of government officials to act as temporary management for an NGO, which could even lead to the closing down of an organization. The government could also force NGOs to accept new voting members for their executive board, which would allow the government to infiltrate and influence any NGO that it might choose to.

It is clear that the changes to the Association Law could have a highly detrimental affect on the activities of NGOs across Jordan. The legislation could, in extremis, not only detract from the reputation of an organization but also lead an NGO to leave Jordan or find itself shut down altogether.



## ACHRS Report on the First Extraordinary Session of Jordanian Parliament

The Amman Center for Human Rights Studies has written a report on the First Extraordinary Session of Jordanian Parliament, detailing the events and outcomes of the session. ACHRS also makes several recommendations on the conclusions of the report.

The report covers the discussion of the proposed changes to the Public Gathering Act ('Assembly Law') and the Societies Law ('Association/ NGO Law'). Both laws were eventually passed. The session also saw the discussion of the revoking of the Jordanian Investment Corporation Law, the Public Health Law, a Draft Law on Gendarmerie Forces, the Financial Leasing Law, a Draft Law on the Council of Vocational and Technical Employment, Training and Education, the Corporation Law, Labour Laws and Amended laws on transport, the maritime authority, the rights of disabled persons, and the general corporation of food and medicine.

After reviewing the overall laws and the discussions that were held on them, ACHRS was able to conclude that:

- 1- The extraordinary parliamentary session was characterized as being a strictly legislative session in the real sense of the word. This is a point which should be credited in favor of the parliament members.
- 2- Some of the laws pertaining to public liberties were not compatible with the international criteria guaranteeing human rights, particularly the conventions which Jordan ratified, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
- The Societies Law of 2008 places unreasonable restrictions on the right to form non-government organizations and deals with these societies as if they should be an extension of the government. It also imposes government control on the founding, financing and activities of the societies. This makes it almost impossible for any non-government organization to undertake an objective critical evaluation.
- The new Law on Public Gathering introduced some improvements on the law currently in force. However, it brought nothing new on the question of political reform be-

cause no change was introduced to the problematic articles of the law currently in force, particularly as regards the definition of the meeting and the need to secure a prior permit from the administrative governor before carrying out any activity. In other words, the law stipulates the prior written approval of the administrative governor to hold any public meeting. Moreover, the administrative governor is not obliged to justify his reasons for denying the granting of the permit for any meeting.

- 3- Non-government organizations were not consulted on the law, particularly those pertaining to public liberties. Needless to say, these organizations have an important role to play in regulating the resources of the people and offering services to the local community. In fact, they constitute a real partner with the government to offer services and to achieve sustainable development.

- 4- Efforts to involve citizens in the legislative process are poor. The Legislation Bureau in Jordan has an electronic site which was established with the support of the United States Agency for International Development [USAID] devoted to publishing the draft laws which the government submits to the House of Representatives for the purpose of dialogue and collection of remarks on these draft laws. However, the draft law on public gatherings and the draft law on societies were not published by the electronic site.

- 5- The social and economic rights of the foreign workers in Jordan are still being ignored by House members. The Labor Law has ignored the rights of foreign workers. It has not allowed Arab and foreign workers to join labor unions. Several House members who opposed the amendment could not introduce other amendments to the law. As for the problems of the Arab and foreign workers in a manner that would protect their interests and enable them to resort to the judiciary. What is important is that in final analysis, the House refused to introduce the amendments.



## ACHRS Recommendations on Parliamentary Report

### Recommendations:

In view of the foregoing conclusions, the Amman Center for Human Rights Studies [ACHRS] recommends the following:

- 1- Attention should be paid to the international conventions on human rights, particularly those which Jordan ratified whenever the House enacts any legislation. On top of this is the legislation pertaining to public liberties such as the Law of Public Gathering and the Law on Societies.
- 2- Involvement of citizens, civil society organizations and the private sector in the legislative policy should be strengthened by providing the opportunity for them to voice their views on this legislation before it is enacted and taking their views into account , all the more so because the philosophy of legislation, to start with, seeks to express the needs of society and to regulate relations among citizens on the one hand, and between the citizens and the State, on the other.
- 3- All draft laws should be published by the newspapers and electronic websites before they are passed so as to enable citizens and the civil society organizations to be aware of them.



*Left: Jordanian Parliament Exterior*

Special attention should be given to the social and economic rights of the Arab and foreign workers and laws that can provide them with protection should be enacted.

The full report is available now on our website, in both English and Arabic: [www.achrs.org](http://www.achrs.org)





# About ACHRS

**A**mmam Center for Human Rights Studies (ACHRS) is an independent, regional, scientific, advocacy center for studies, research and training on issues of human rights and democracy.

In pursuit of contributing to the **dissemination of a culture of human rights**, our work and activities aim at **strengthening civil society** in Jordan and in the Arab World, and at inducing a change to the general level of awareness and sensibility towards human rights and democracy.

The projects carried out by ACHRS mainly concentrate on training for democracy and human rights as they are closely related and highly complementary. Conducting studies and research to serve as an informational basis is a further means to achieve our aims.

Being an organisation, founded in 1999 and registered in Jordan, the work of ACHRS strongly depends on the knowledge and skills of its staff and volunteers. Currently ACHRS has a personnel staff of 10 and counts 150 actively contributing volunteers.

The Center aims at helping in

spreading and strengthening human rights culture in the Arab World. For this sake, the ACHRS is **committed to all the criteria which are contained in the provisions of international and regional conventions and declarations on human rights**, as issued by the United Nations or by regional, Arab, and Jordanian organizations.

The ACHRS seeks to achieve its goals through educational, intellectual, and cultural activities, particularly through **studies, research, and seminars**. These activities are either organized by ACHRS alone, or in collaboration with other international, Arab and Jordanian organizations, active in the field of human rights.

The ACHRS implements scientific and educational programs, such as theoretical and applied research and studies; carries out programs on general awareness and education on human rights; organizes training courses; convenes conferences, seminars, workshops and study sessions; offers consultations, technical and scientific services, and information to students and researchers, interested in human rights issues. The Center also publishes bulletins, reports, and

specialized periodicals on human rights. In addition, ACHRS trains target groups of men and women activists from governmental and non-governmental human rights organizations on the skills of dialogue, collective work, critical thinking, and effective communication.

In pursuit of its goals, the ACHRS cooperates with local, Arab, and international scientific institutions, whose activities are compatible with ACHRS activities.

The ACHRS refrains from carrying out any political or religious activities, nor is it involved in any Jordanian, Arab or international political association which might negatively affect the neutrality or scientific objectivity of its activities.

## ACHRS and the other organizations

### ACHRS is:

- In consultative status with UN ECOSOC
- Constituting member of the Federation of Human Rights Centers in the Arab World
- Member of the Arab Network for NGOs
- Founder of the Arab Society for Academic Freedom
- Member of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
- Founder of the Election Network in the Arab World
- Member of the Coalition for the International

Criminal Court (CICC)

- Member of the Arab Coalition for the International Criminal Court
- Member of the International Federation of Workers' Education Associations (IFWEA)
- Member of the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN)
- Member of the Euro-Mediterranean Youth Platform
- Member of the Euro-Mediterranean Civil Forum



## ACHRS– A Brief History

The Center was established in 1999 and formally registered in 2000 with the aim of spreading and strengthening human rights culture in the Arab World and providing a democratic platform for dialogue, coordination and integration of the efforts of governmental and non-governmental organisations of human rights. The Center achieves its goals through educational, intellectual and cultural activities including research and studies, conferences, seminars and workshops as well as offering consultations, technical and scientific services, publications and specialised periodicals on human rights.

### General information about who we are:

- ACHRS was founded in 1999, and registered as a Jordanian Organization in 2000
- Currently ACHRS consists of 10 full-time paid staff and over 150 volunteers
- 50% of the work of ACHRS is done on a voluntary basis
- The focus on ACHRS is 50% on Jordan and 50% on the MENA region

### Objectives of ACHRS:

- Main objective is to promote human rights by raising awareness. Raising awareness is done via training courses
- ACHRS is seeking to work bottom up, as ACHRS believes that top down can only be done by international financial pressure
- ACHRS hopes that small changes at the bottom will snowball
- ACHRS focuses on youth from all areas of society, and never sees gender as an obstacle to participation

### ACHRS is funded by:

- International organizations
- Foundations, mainly in Europe
- Foreign Ministry grants of European countries

### Activities by ACHRS:

- over 500 Training courses since 1999
- over 20,000 participants from 18 different countries
- Participants: 65% female, 70% under the age of 30
- Target groups: university students, journalists, lawyers, judges, staff from civil society organizations, teachers in schools, prison officers.

### Specifically for Iraq:

- 250 training courses for Iraqi NGOs; 210 in Iraq with our partners and 65 in Jordan
- 6550 activists trained; 5250 in Iraq and 1300 in Jordan
- Connections to 200 Iraqi NGOs from all ethnicities, religions and regions
- Organised 207 3-day training courses on 'Encouraging Women and Youth to Participate in Political Life.' 5175 participants in total (50% male, 50% female) trained in 2006.
- In 2008, 10,000 election monitors were trained by ACHRS and partners in Iraq for the 2008 Municipality Elections and registration process
- "Training of Trainers" courses held specifically for Iraqis in 2006
- A support network for Iraqi NGOs on 'Encouraging youth and women participation in elections'
- A support network for Iraqi NGOs on peace-building

### Specifically for Syria:

- ACHRS enjoys good relations to 12-13 Civil society organizations in the country
- Course held on EU program
- Course on Human Rights monitoring
- Course on election monitoring
- Seminar on Syrian civil society
- Training of Trainers courses

### Conferences at a glance:

- Conferences on academic freedom in Arab universities in 2004 and 2008
- Conference on academic freedom in Iraqi universities in 2006
- Conference on Human Rights and Criminal Justice, which brought government ministers, academics and civil society representatives to sit at the same table for the first time in 2006
- Regional conference to Challenge the Death Penalty in the Arab World in 2007
- Over 117 conferences, seminars, roundtables, discussion groups and lectures held on many aspects of human rights attended by 120 academics, politicians, journalists, students, activists, CSOs and NGOs from 45 different countries.

### Publications:

- 3 annual Reports on Press Freedom in the Arab Countries, which is the first such report from an independent NGO in the Arab World
- 2 annual reports on the Death Penalty in the Arab World



- ACHRS has also published some 17 books on human rights and civil society issues

**Networks:**

- Arab Society on Academic Freedom
- Arab Network on Elections
- Member of the Union of Education Workers
- Arab Network for Human Rights Trainers
- Jordanian Network for Human Rights Trainers
- Arab League for Democracy

**Coalitions**

- Jordan Coalition of Civil Society Organisations
- Arab Coalition Against the Death Penalty
- Instrumental in establishing national coalitions against the death penalty in Jordan, Yemen, Egypt and Mauritania, with Penal Reform International
- Arab Federation for Human Rights Centres

**Cooperation with International Organizations**

- In Special Consultative Status with UNECOSOC
- Member of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
- Member of the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN)

**Websites:**

- [www.achrs.org/english](http://www.achrs.org/english), general website of Amman Center for Human Rights Studies
- [www.awrd.net](http://www.awrd.net), focuses on reform and democracy in the Middle East
- [www.alerhab.net](http://www.alerhab.net), focuses on terrorism globally
- [www.intekhabat.org](http://www.intekhabat.org), focuses on elections in the Arab World
- [www.afwinfo.org](http://www.afwinfo.org), focuses on academic freedom in the Arab World
- [www.jafwinfo.org](http://www.jafwinfo.org), focuses on academic freedom in Jordan

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