Greetings from ACHRS

The beginning of the New Year has brought many new opportunities and challenges for ACHRS. The Center is carrying on with its activities on media freedom and independence of the judiciary, by holding a training session on the rights to access of information and a seminar on the priorities and strategies to reform the judiciary system in Jordan. Once again, ACHRS has been able to reach a high number of professionals: journalists, members of NGOs, public officials and lawyers to take part in these activities and they have contributed to the success of our projects.

ACHRS, as a member of the Elections Network in the Arab Region, was involved in the elections of the Councils of the Iraqi Governorates that were held on Saturday, January 31, 2009; these were the second elections of its kind since 2003. The majority of the elections were held according to the system of the open list, which is a positive development in the electoral process. According to the figures published by the Higher Independent Elections Commission in Iraq, 15 million voters were eligible to vote in the elections of the councils of the Iraqi governorates. The Elections Network in the Arab Region would like to commend the efforts that were made to hold this major election on a periodic basis and on its scheduled constitutional due date. Nearly 7,000 polling centers were made available consisting of 42,000 polling stations with a total of 59,000 local monitors and more than 180,000 representatives of candidates active in the elections. Additionally, two offices for the registration of international observers were opened at home and abroad. The records of the Commission have indicated that 14,431 candidates competed in the elections, with the breakdown being 3,912 women and 10,519 men. They competed for 440 seats of the council of governories, including 105 seats for women in 14 Iraqi governorates.

In light of our strong commitment to human rights in the Region, ACHRS is very concerned with the recent attacks on Gaza and the subsequent human rights violations. ACHRS is developing its international dimension and it is strengthening its ties with the United Nations System. We took part in the Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council, as stakeholders for Jordan, and we have submitted a detailed report about the human rights situation in the Country. We also recently participated in the CONGO (the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations) and in the HURIDOCS (Human Rights Documentation and Information Systems) meetings. Our international network is rapidly increasing.

Lastly, in light of staff changes and technical difficulties you may not have received last quarter’s newsletter. In case you missed it we have highlighted a few key stories and info from the end of 2008 in this edition of the newsletter. In the future we will work hard to ensure that the newsletter is delivered on schedule; but for now consider this the ACHRS bonus edition! We apologize for this inconvenience. As always, ACHRS is hard at work. Enjoy the newsletter and many thanks for reading!

1 A copy of this report, Human Rights Conditions in the Hashmite Kingdom of Jordan, can be found, in English and in Spanish, our website at www.achrs.org.
ACHRS Holds Training Session on the “Right of Access to Information”

A training session on the "Right of Access to Information" was held in Amman on Feb. 21st 2009. The session, organized by ACHRS and supported by MEPI, had a total of 30 participants, each representing various audio-visual and print media, some ministries, and some civil society organizations as well. Director of the Amman Center for Human Rights Studies [ACHRS], Dr. Nizam Assaf, has declared that the training session is part of an ACHRS program initiative on Jordanian media and media freedoms.

Dr. Assaf explained that during the four-day training session, numerous topics pertaining to the right of access to information were discussed. Amongst the main topics were: the international criteria on the freedom of opinion and expression, the historic development of the right of access to information, and common principles of laws pertaining to the right of access to information, globally. The topics also included the right of the media workers to access information, the law guaranteeing the right of access to information in Jordan, and the law on the protection of the secrets and documents of the State.

The session also included practical training on the international criteria of the freedom of opinion and expression, training on trials involving issues of press and publications, and the right of access to information. A team composed of Jordanian media workers, including lecturers and specialized trainers, conducted the session. We are thankful to Yahya Shuqayr, Umar Shneikat, and Salem Qubaylat.

Let us recognize that Jordan is the only Arab country which has acceded to the Law on the Right of Access to Information nearly one and a half years ago. Also, remember that the ACHRS has issued three annual reports on the press freedoms in the Arab Homeland and held more than 20 specialized training sessions for media workers, with more than 300 participants from 18 Arab countries.

Panel from the EMHRN—sponsored seminar on the Independence and Impartiality of the Jordanian Judiciary held in Amman, January 30-31st 2009

The Amman Center for Human Rights Studies, with support from the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), was able to send a delegation to the 4th Working Group Session of the Universal Periodic Review, held in Geneva from February 2nd to 13th 2009. Attendance at the conference came after ACHRS, in conjunction with the Arab Women’s Organisation and Arab Organisation for Human Rights (Jordan), submitted a report to the UPR (Universal Periodic Review), outlining human rights issues in Jordan. In addition to thanking the aforementioned organizations for submitting Stakeholder’s Reports, and drawing attention to human rights issues in Jordan, we would also like to thank other international partners including Reporters Sans Frontières, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, International Commission of Jurists, Al-Karama for Human Rights and the European Centre for Law and Justice. We would also like to send a special thank you to the Jordan National Center for Human Rights, for submitting their findings as well.

ACHRS acknowledges the good work being done by the Jordanian government to improve the civil rights situation in the Kingdom. With regard to political rights, we hope that Jordan will make serious changes to laws that currently restrict public freedoms, such as Society, Assembly, Election and Party Laws. We feel that the UPR represents an excellent opportunity for Jordan to receive advice and guidance on to how to continue this trend. ACHRS would like to offer recommendations to the government of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, so that dignity, freedom and justice can be achieved for all. In particular, concerning the laws governing NGOs, we recommend that the government:

- Acknowledge the good work of NGOs in Jordan by working with them to ensure that the principles of Freedom of Association, Expression and Participation are enshrined in the legislation.
- Amend the Societies Act to eliminate the need for prior registration of new organizations.
- Retract all restrictions on permissible activities of NGOs.
- Establish a relationship with civil society, so that dialogue on these amendments can be exchanged.

Concerning the Rights of Women, we recommend that the government:

- Fully ratify CEDAW, and continue to withdraw all reservations.
- Sign the Additional Protocol of CEDAW.
- Ensure the existence of a comprehensive law criminalizing all forms of violence against women, and increase the number of 'home shelters' in Jordan for violated women.
- Allow Jordanian women to confer their nationality upon their children without exception.
- Adjust the Personal Status Law to adhere to international conventions.

(Cont. on page 4)
ACHRS Holds Seminar: "Independence and Impartiality of the Jordanian Judiciary - Priorities and Strategies for Reform"

The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN) and the Amman Center for Human Rights Studies held a seminar entitled “The Independence and Impartiality of the Jordanian Judiciary - Priorities and Strategies for Reform”. This seminar took place in Amman at the Hotel Jerusalem International from January 30-31, 2009. The seminar was a follow-up to an initial meeting on this issue which took place in Amman in January of 2007 and was followed by the publication, in January 2008, of the EMHRN country report on “The Independence and Impartiality of the Judiciary – Jordan”, authored by Zaha Al Majali and Omar Qaddoura. The goals of the follow-up seminar this past January were to present and discuss the content and conclusions of the EMHRN report on the Jordanian judiciary, to discuss and refine conclusions and recommendations, and to discuss how Jordanian civil society organizations can join efforts and work together to promote more efficient judicial reform in Jordan. This seminar worked to support and deepen the already ongoing efforts to reform the justice system in Jordan.

The Amman Center for Human Rights Studies Takes Part in the Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council (Cont.)

(cont. from page 3)

Concerning the Elimination of Torture, we urge the Jordanian government to:

- Sign the Optional Protocol on CAT.
- Set up an independent mechanism to examine complaints
- Allow itself to be party to Special Measures and visits from Special Rapporteurs so as to ensure adherence to International Standards.
- Fully enforce the laws criminalizing torture, and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice.

As a civil society organization of good reputation and with Special Consultative Status with UN ECOSOC, ACHRS would be happy to provide support to the government in meeting any recommendations resulted from this session.
On International Women's Day, ACHRS would like to celebrate the economic, political and social achievements of women. This is the time to stress the importance of gender equality to create societies based on justice principles. Here in the Arab Countries, and worldwide we are witnesses to many kinds of discrimination against women. In 50% of the world's countries legislation still permits forms of legal gender-based discrimination. In the legal system, women experience discrimination in matters of pension and social security benefits, inheritance, divorce, ability to travel, child custody, citizenship, and the value of their Shari’a court testimony in certain circumstances. In addition to this, women face discrimination in practice. Worldwide, women are paid less than men for the same jobs and social pressures often discourage many women from pursuing professional careers.

ACHRS strongly believes that the institutional discrimination of women is one of the main causes for the social and economic problems of the Arab region. This is the reason why we are calling for an improvement in the social status of women and the eradication of legal discrimination – in theory and practice. Despite some positive developments with regard to the limited rights of women in Jordan, we would still like to point out some critical aspects. Firstly, although in 2007 the Jordanian government ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), it kept the reservations of 1992, when it initially ratified the Convention. Furthermore, there are still restrictions on freedom of housing and accommodation for women. Article 37 of the Code of Personal Status reads that "the wife must obey the husband and move to live with him wherever he wants". Nor can women yet demand divorce, due to the government's refusal to amend the existing law from 2006. However, men, as Muslims in Jordan, are entitled to up to four wives at one time (granted, there are some controls on the first marriage.)

2008 saw more positive development, whereby a new law on domestic violence was ratified, but there is still the issue of 'honour killings' not being addressed by law. Often times the perpetrators stand not as common criminals, but benefit from the "extraordinary circumstances" clause in the Penal Code (Article 98), allowing the accused to take the role of a 'hero' who defends the 'honour' of the family. The endangered women are jailed for their protection, and their release can only be granted by one of her male relatives. The detained women are eventually transferred to a 'home shelter,' or 'Dar Al-Wefaq,' of which in Jordan there are currently 3, totalling 100 spaces for detainees.

Some positive aspects, though limited, can be elicited from the fact that there are a number of women ministers in government and judicial positions. This is perhaps due to the 'quota policy' implemented by Article IV of CEDAW which dictates that there must be a certain percentage of women in represented in party and elec-
ENAR Report on Watching the Elections of the Council of Governorates in Iraq

ACHRS, founding member of the Elections Network in the Arab Region (ENAR), is pleased to extend its thanks to the Higher Independent Elections Commission in Iraq for allowing the Network to observe the election process for the council of Iraqi governorates. The Network was represented by a team of Arab and international observers. ENAR declared that monitoring the elections extends beyond the process of polling at the ballot boxes; it is also an effort to determine the extent of respect by government authorities for the main requirements of holding free and fair elections. In other words, it means the respect of the basic human rights, foremost of these are the freedom of opinion and expression, the freedom of peaceful congregation, the freedom of forming political associations, and the freedom of movement, amongst other freedoms and human rights.

As a confirmation of the Network’s principle of commitment to independence and non-bias objectivity, and on account of abundant experience in the management of the affairs of elections, the team members from the Elections Network in the Arab Region watched the local council elections in Iraq since the beginning of the election process. These team members were the same members of the Iraqi organizations that are affiliated with the Network.

The Network also held a number of important interviews with government officials, party leaders, Iraqi political blocs, a number of candidates running in the elections, and the non-Government organizations to make sure that their rights were being respected and to document any complaints regarding the election process. Experts from the Network have thoroughly studied the Iraqi Electoral Law and its amendments. These experts have also acquainted themselves with preparations for polling, beginning from the period of registration, when campaigns began spreading awareness among the electorate of the importance of using the right of participation in elections and the period of election campaigning. The attitude and performance of the media was also closely monitored.

CoNGO Board Meeting in Bangkok Launches Its First Regional Committee for Asia-Pacific

ACHRS, thanks to its consultative status with the United Nations, participated as observer in the CoNGO Board Meeting, held in Bangkok, February 23-25 2009. For the first time in the CoNGO’s history, a meeting was held outside of one of the CoNGO’s three centers: Geneva, New York or Vienna. This meaningful event shows the CoNGO’s willingness to outreach to regions in the “Global South,” those that are often not fully represented on the international level.

CoNGO (the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations) in a special consultative relationship with the United Nations, is an association of independent, international, non-profit and non-governmental organizations. It facilitates the participation of NGOs in United Nations debates and decision-making processes, ensuring that NGOs are present and represented when governments discuss issues of global concern at the United Nations.
Women’s Day 2009 (cont.)

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However, these percentages are still quite small and quite arbitrary.

We believe that women's role as decision makers and leaders needs to be supported and increased, by enforcing women's capacity to understand and claim their rights and by encouraging initiatives run by women. Women should become the protagonists of a deeper social change.

ACHRS would like to renew its strong commitment to strengthening women's rights in Jordan and across the MENA region. Therefore, ACHRS is making an urgent call to join efforts with other Arab countries, and countries all around the globe, to strive for a world free from violations against women. For only when we fully achieve women's rights and gender equality will we have truly achieved human rights.

CoNGO Board Meeting in Bangkok Launches Its First Regional Committee for Asia-Pacific

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Nations. CoNGO also facilitates NGO discussions on such issues. Since its foundation in 1948, CoNGO has worked relentlessly to ensure that the voices of NGOs are heard throughout the international arena.

The three-day CoNGO Board Meeting had a full agenda: officers presented their annual reports, members reviewed CoNGO programs, and services and activities for 2009 were set up. In addition to this, CoNGO announced that it is embarking on a revised membership profile, improving its communication, and on a revision of the structure and leadership of CoNGO Substantive Committees.

In his inspiring speech, President Liberato Bautista focused attention on the opportunity to "define the present and shape the future". He said: "we can bring CoNGO to a level where it can help civil society re-imagine international relations so that NGOs can be valued and taken seriously as a pillar of the international system". The launch of the CoNGO Regional Committee for Asia-Pacific represents one step towards the revitalization of civil society and the organization of regional expressions of CoNGO.

ACHRS is now a part of the first Regional Committee, along with 24 other organizations from the Asian Continent. Therefore, we will be actively engaged in the new challenge of facilitating Asian NGOs' participation in all UN and CoNGO activities, globally and regionally.
From Last Time: Highlights from 2008

The Election Network in the Arab Region [ENAR] Held Its Third Board Meeting

As part of the celebrations marking the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Election Network in the Arab Region [ENAR] held a meeting for its Board of Directors on Saturday, December 6, 2008 in Amman. Present were a number of the members of the Board of Directors representing Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Bahrain, Syria, and Kuwait. The participants approved the minutes from the second meeting of the Board of Directors, held in Doha in May 2007, and discussed the report on activities of ENAR since the constituent conference held in 2006 to the present. Participants also approved the preliminary working plans of ENAR for 2009, particularly for monitoring presidential and parliamentary elections and moved to approve several applications submitted for ENAR membership from Arab (cont. on page)

Women’s Rights Classes Graduate as UDHR Turns 60

In December we saw the graduation of five classes on women’s rights in the Jordanian governorates of Jerash, Zarqa, Karak, Salt and Madaba. On the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Amman Center for Human Rights Studies [ACHRS] held five sessions on women’s rights in each of the five aforementioned governorates of Jordan. The first session was held in cooperation with the Society of the Ladies of Bounty for the Care of Orphans in Salt in which 20 men and women participated. The second was held in cooperation with the Liqa’ Home for People with Special Needs in Madaba in which 20 men and women participated. The third was held in Jerash in cooperation patronage of the Chairman of the Union, Mrs. Nuha al-Ma’aytah, in which 30 men and women participated. The fourth was held in Zarqa in cooperation with the General Union of Jordanian women and the final session was held in Karak in cooperation with the Cooperative Women’s Society in which 25 men and women participated.

Participants in the training sessions discussed the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the management of campaigns on women's issues, violence against women, the history of social gender and gender concepts and roles, family violence, women’s stereotypes in the media, forms of abuse against children, family and marriage rights, women's participation in elections, women’s rights as stipulated by labour law, women and decision-making centres, and economic empowerment of women. The training was conducted by a number of human rights workers from Jordan and some fraternal Arab countries.
Under the patronage of the Minister of Political Development, Dr Kamal Nasser, and in the presence of Mr. Patrick Renauld, the ambassador of the European Union in Jordan, four human rights organizations in Jordan celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and launched the Jordanian Forum for Human Rights. The four Jordanian human rights organizations are the Amman Center for Human Rights Studies [ACHRS], the Arab Organization for Human Rights (AOHR) in Jordan, the Jordanian Society for Human Rights, and the Arab Women Society. The aim of the Jordanian Forum for human rights is to initiate dialogue on human rights conditions in Jordan, to exchange information, and to keep contacts among various civil society organizations, human rights activists and other official bodies concerned with human rights.

On behalf of the four organizations, attorney Hani El Dahleh, president of AOHR in Jordan, made a speech calling on the governments of the Arab countries to work for reviewing legislation which places restrictions on freedoms, to enforce legislation pertaining to arrest and investigation, to investigate claims about the torture and punishment of any official who is confirmed to have been involved in torture, to support the independence of the judiciary, and to allow greater freedom of the press.

Dr. Kamal Nasser also addressed those gathered about the significance of the Universal Declaration. He called on the international community, particularly the European Union, to work for the advancement of the rights of peoples and the rights of individuals. He pointed out that the Jordanian government is in the process of amending the Societies Law, to enable civil society organizations to play their role in an active and transparent (cont. on page 10)

The Election Network in the Arab Region [ENAR] Held Its Third Board Meeting (cont.)

organizations conducting election work. The organizations were from Morocco, Egypt and Palestine. Furthermore, it was concluded that the next general assembly meeting for ENAR would be held in Amman in July 2009.

President of ENAR, Dr Nizam Assaf, shared that preparations for the successful establishment of ENAR took ACHRS one full year before the convening of the ENARA constituent conference in Amman in 2006. He added that ENAR now has more than 50 non-government member organizations with programming that deals with the various aspects of elections; these organizations represent 15 different Arab countries. Additionally, ENAR has an electronic observatory that has been publishing a monthly report on elections in the Arab World for the last two and a half years. Since its establishment, ENAR has trained domestic observers and monitored parliamentary and presidential elections in Mauritania, Yemen, Jordan, Iraq, Bahrain, Morocco, Kuwait and Syria.
From Last Time: Highlights from 2008

Human Rights Organizations Celebrate 60th Anniversary of UDHR By Launching a Human Rights Forum (cont).

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way. He said that the government is open to political parties, including parties of opposition, and he looks forward to the promotion of cooperation with the civil society organizations. At the end of the celebration, the participants approved the appeal issued by the four human rights organizations addressed to the Prime Minister of Jordan. It demanded amendments to the Societies Law and all laws relevant to freedom and democracy.

ACHRS Staff Changes

The International Relations Unit has witnessed the departure of Heather McRobie and Oliver Williams. The Centre would like to thank them for their great work and for the valuable contribution they gave to the Center. We hope to keep in touch and we wish them the best. On the other hand, The International Relations Unit welcomes to its staff Emily Crawford and Valentina Pomatto, and wishes them an excellent stay in Amman.
The Amman 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 change to the general level of awareness and sensibility towards issues of 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.

A young organization, founded and registered in Jordan in 1999, 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. Though keeping in mind that human rights and democracy are relevant to all segments of society, our activities mainly target women and youth. The activities are carried out either solely by ACHRS or in cooperation with other local, Arab and international NGOs and organisations of civil society.

ACHRS is …

- In consultative Status with ECOSOC
- Constituting member of the Federation of Human Rights Centres in the Arab World
- Member of the Arab Network for NGOs
- Member of the Arab Social Forum
- Correspondent member of the International Federation for Human Rights (fidh)
- Member of CIVICUS
- 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

Activities
Since its foundation in 1999, ACHRS has organized and carried out:

- more than 500 courses on various Human Rights topics with more than 13,000 participants from 18 different countries, 65% of which were women and 70% under the age of 30.
- more than 120 conferences, seminars, discussion groups and lectures about different human rights cases with more than 1,200 thinkers, researchers, experts, and activists in human rights and civil society from other Arab and foreign countries.
- published twenty books on human rights and civil society cases, in addition to a myriad of articles and periodical reports.