



Dialogue on
Globalization

CONFERENCE REPORT
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Report of the training course on human rights mechanisms

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From 3-7 November, FES Geneva and the Geneva Institute for Human Rights (GIHR) held a training seminar on human rights mechanisms for human rights activists and journalists from the Arab region. The program included technical sessions on regional and international mechanisms for human rights protection, meetings with Geneva-based experts and members of UN treaty bodies as well as the participation at UN Committee sessions and workshops on the human rights situation in the Arab region.

Proceedings

Debates in the Human Rights Council and other UN bodies arise quite regularly on the universality of human rights on the one hand and specific values and traditions of religions and cultures on the other. Yet, there is a lack of substantive debate given the intergovernmental nature of these institutions and a limited representation of the civil societies, in particular from developing Muslim countries.

Against this background, FES Geneva decided to broaden its human rights program in reaching out to civil society actors in the Arab region, enabling them to use the UN human rights mechanisms more in the pursuit of their interests.

The seminar, organized in collaboration with the Geneva Institute for Human Rights (GIHR, see below) contained the following sessions.

Laying the groundwork and leveling the knowledge within the group, the seminar started out with sessions on the regional and international system of protection and promotion of human rights. It introduced the regional systems of human rights protection, namely the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Council of Europe, the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights and the Arab Human Rights Charter.

A subsequent block of the program focused on the International system of protection and promotion of human rights: The nine main human rights conventions and the eight main human rights treaty bodies. The topic was further deepened by sessions on the purpose of reporting, the preparation and drafting of a national report, and information on the Complaints Procedure.

Briefings by members of the Committees on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) and the Convention Against Torture (CAT) as well as the participation at the CESCR session completed the picture by allowing practical experience and interaction with those treaty bodies.

In other sessions, the Mandate of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as the system of Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council were explained by officials of the Office of the High Commissioner for

Human Rights. Information on the rather political side of the UN human rights system followed, focusing on the Human Rights Council and its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) procedure.

To render those sessions more practical and make the information usable for the participants, a workshop on national reporting completed this block.

The Role of the National Human Rights Institutions and NGOs was addressed by representatives of both groups. Broadening the scope of the seminar, the role of the ILO's Standards Department in the protection of labour rights and its relation to the UN human rights system was presented by the ILO to show the complementarity of the two mechanisms and bodies.

An internal workshop on the human rights situation in the Arab region – a debate based on the participants' experiences concluded the seminar, giving again the opportunity to the participants to share their knowledge in an interactive manner.

The participants actively engaged throughout the course and profited from the thematic sessions and the meetings with experts. They were also able to establish links and contacts for the future. To use and maintain these contacts, it was clearly an advantage that FES staff from three country offices participated at this course.

Outlook

In the follow-up, the participants of the course wished that the cooperation with the MENA region on human rights issues be continued and enhanced. It was stressed that future seminars of this kind, if offered in Arabic language and on further specific topics, could have a very important capacity building effect on human rights organizations in the MENA region. Getting acquainted with the Geneva based human rights bodies and mechanism was equally important as capacity building seminars in the Arab region and also on a national level. Practically oriented human rights seminars were still lacking there, local and national NGO's needed in particular information on the practical application and use of international (UN-) mechanisms.

Such national or regional seminars could additionally strengthen regional dialogue and cooperation among civil societies. Attention was

drawn to the fact, that many important texts and resources are not available in Arabic. So far, FES Geneva has begun to fill the gap by translating two publications on human rights. Similar efforts could be possible in the future.

All in all, a combination of yearly seminars in Geneva and national as well as regional pro-

grams could strengthen nongovernmental organizations working on human rights and link them up with the Geneva-based institutions. It would enable them to voice their concerns more targeted and effectively within the respective institutions and processes in Geneva enhancing human rights protection within their countries.

About the author:

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About the partner organization in the event: Geneva Institute for Human Rights:

GIHR is a non-governmental, non-profit organization based in Geneva. The Institute is an academic study and research institution that is independent from all governments, political parties, organizations and philosophical or religious groups, which raises awareness and understanding about the importance of human rights. It works for some of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable communities, seeking to ensure that the principles of equality, dignity and respect are incorporated into practice and policy at all levels of public service. The Institute was founded in July 2004.

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