

THE DANISH INSTITUTE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (DIHR) ACROSS THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

DIHR partners in different Middle East and North African (MENA) countries face similar human rights challenges. Crosscutting initiatives focused on exchanging knowledge and experience will therefore help to create a common understanding of human rights in the region.

With this in mind, DIHR seeks to:

- Foster regional co-operation, exchange and mutual understanding.
- Develop capacities in human rights issues, which support national human rights reform processes.
- Facilitate participation and engagement in exchange and research co-operation on human rights issues of common interest.
- Create public debate and inform the public about human rights issues.

BRIEF FACTS

Geography: The Middle East and North Africa covers an extensive region, extending from Morocco to Iran, including all Middle Eastern and Maghreb countries.

Demography: The population of the MENA region at its least extent is about 381 million people, about 6% of the total world population.

Economy: The MENA region has vast reserves of petroleum and natural gas that make it a vital source of global economic stability. According to the Oil and Gas Journal (January 1, 2009), the MENA region has 60% of the world's oil reserves (810.98 billion barrels) and 45% of the world's natural gas reserves (2,868,886 billion cubic feet.)

Official language: Arabic is the primary common language across the region, but English and French is also used dependent on the colonial heritage.

The crosscutting activities involve partners representing government, state, academia, and civil society primarily from Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen. However, there is also co-operation with representatives from Lebanon, Morocco and the Palestinian Territories.

DIHR PROGRAMME 2016

Regional human rights course

In 2016, DIHR will organise a human rights course for partners in the MENA region with the facilitation being done by both DIHR and regional experts. Building on the assessments of four previous regional courses, facilitation will be in Arabic to the extent possible, sessions contextualised, and practice oriented. Through this course, DIHR will work to develop the human rights knowledge and capacity of partners in the MENA region. The goal is to address common human rights challenges in order to provide a benefit for the partners in their daily lives.

DIHR will arrange inter-active sessions that focus on the human rights issues that are important to partners. During these, partner representatives and DIHR will present and discuss analyses of trends in the regions in order to create a common frame of reference and to contribute to the development of ideas for DIHR's future engagement in the region. As such, the course will also feed into the formulation of DIHR's rationale for its MENA work.

Research visit and seminar

Within the same theme as the regional course, DIHR will invite one MENA human rights expert to carry out a 4-6 week research visit to Copenhagen. The aim will be to combine the practitioners view from the regional course with a more academic angle of the same theme. The outcome of the research visit, such as a paper or an article, will be shared with partners across the region in order to leverage and strengthen the networks established through DIHR's regional events. Moreover, DIHR will organise a public seminar in Copenhagen in order to create awareness about the work carried out and the human rights topics of importance in the MENA region.

Awareness raising in Denmark

In 2015, the second edition of the Copenhagen Debate was held by DIHR in co-operation with Berlingske at the National Library in Copenhagen. The event drew a large audience – 350-400 people in total – that engaged in a debate on the constructed dichotomy between “Human Rights and Democracy” and “Security and Stability”, and voted on the views presented by scholars and activists of both genders and considerable age difference. As one of the panellists, DIHR succeeded in having a representative of the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate – the Tunisian Quartet – Mr. Abdessatar Ben Moussa.

In 2016, DIHR will host a similar public debate to create a Danish focus on the human rights situation in the MENA. The theme of the debate will draw inspiration from the topics dealt with at the regional course and the research visit.

MENA National Human Rights Institutions (NHRI) staff exchange

Knowledge and experience sharing is an important component in ensuring that regional synergies between project partners and activities are developed and maintained. This is a prominent feature in all DIHR's projects in the region, but there is also a need for this exchange to happen in the region and between peers in order to facilitate both the establishment of regional linkages and network, and the spill-over and retention of capacity among stakeholders. To support this, DIHR will facilitate staff exchange among NHRIs in the MENA region. DIHR will do this by engaging one-two staff from a NHRI to work with another NHRI in the region for a period on a specific topic. DIHR will facilitate the exchange by agreeing on ToRs for the participating staff as well as ensuring that knowledge attained is documented.

Regional MA Programme in Democratic Governance

In 2014 and 2015, DIHR supported the European Inter-University Centre (EIUC) for Human Rights and Democratisation in establishing and developing a MENA regional Masters programme on “Democratic Governance, Human Rights and Democracy”. This led to the graduation of the first cohort of alumni in July 2015 with students from both Europe and the MENA region. In 2016, DIHR will continue to support this programme and network, which comprises St. Joseph University (Lebanon), University of Bir Zeit (Palestine), the International University of Rabat (Morocco) and Ca'Foscari University (Italy). There are plans to include the University of Carthage (Tunisia) in the network. The idea is to develop a programme that is based in the MENA, which involves professionals, educates students to know about human rights, democratic principles and institutions, and creates a Euro-Mediterranean network of academics and academic institutions.

Main expected outcome of DIHR activities: Human rights based dialogue and exchange deepens the understanding, and promotion and protection of human rights both across the Middle East and North Africa and in Denmark.

Contact persons at DIHR

- Department Director, Lisbet Ilkjær, lik@humanrights.dk, +45 3269 8915
- Programme Manager for MENA, Niklas Kabel Pedersen, nipe@humanrights.dk, +45 9132 5641