

ENHANCING YOUTH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN JORDAN

The Jordan Office of Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) organized in collaboration with Mossawah Center for Civil Society Development a roundtable discussion in Al-Mafraq and Al-Zarqa on enhancing youth's political participation in Jordan. The two-day event, held in December 11 and December 14, 2014, brought together students, young men and women, activists and journalists. Issues deliberated in the meeting were along the lines of such questions as: How can universities enhance youth's political participation? What roles do the media and civil society organizations play? What rights does the youth have to participate in the political life?

Following the welcoming remarks of KAS Project Manager Nidaa Al-Shraideh, and President of Mossawah Center for Civil Society Development, Suliman Al Khawaldeh, former Minister of Information and director of Imdad Media Center, Nabil Al Sharif highlighted the role of the media in enhancing youth's political participation, with specific reference to the various manifestations of the new media. "It gives ways to the youth to actively communicate with politicians and encourages reaction, feedback and debates.

In the second session, Director of the King Abdullah Fund for Development at the Hashemite University, Hamdi Shdifat talked about the role of Universities in enhancing the political participation of the youth in Jordan. He high-

lighted the roles of lectures and seminars in enriching students' awareness of political issues and participation. Their participation in initiatives for political participation and joint events of universities and civil society organizations as well as elections of student councils would enhance their political participation. Shdifat shared some success stories of students participated in voluntary work and thus were actively taking part in public life.

The President of Mossawah Center for Civil Society Development Suliman Al Khawaldeh discussed in the third session the role of civil society organizations in enhancing youth political participation. He mentioned a study that shows the lack of youth political participation. Al Khawaldeh cited some reasons for the young Jordanians refraining from engagement in the political life and stressed the role of civil society organizations to enhance their participation. The participants were called upon to actively engage with civil organizations in order to learn how to contribute to the decision-making processes. The first step in this endeavor, according to Al Khawaldeh, is the creation of a roadmap for the active participation of the Jordanian youth

The last session was a reading of laws about the rights of the youth to participate in political life. Dr. Akef Ma'aitah, a researcher and advisor on women's issues and human rights, first talked about the rights of the youth as mandated by the Jordanian legal instruments, including first and foremost the Constitution. For instance, young adults have the right to vote and to be elected and to join a political party and

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to form committees. Ma'aitah highlighted the obstacles the youth faces concerning political participation and proposed how to get over them, stressing the need for more awareness campaigns on the rights of the youth in this particular area. Young adults need to be informed about their rights concerning political participation as well as about their responsibilities, he said.

Conclusion:

At the end of the meeting, the participants came up with the following recommendations:

- Civil society organizations need to implement awareness raising campaigns on the political participation of the youth;
- Universities, the media and civil society organizations need to work together more closely to empower the youth in participating in public life;
- More meetings are needed to enhance the awareness of the youth's role in public life
- A law, that supports youth in their right to vote, especially in their right to be elected must be proposed;
- The media needs to put a stronger emphasis on the issue of youth's political participation;
- Raising awareness campaigns of the rights of young Jordanians to engage politically, and to be involved in political parties in particular, need to be implemented