

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.

AUSLANDSBÜRO JORDANIEN

Bloggers for elections' observation

July 3rd and 4th, 2010

NIDA'A AL-SHRAIDEH

DR. MARTIN BECK

www.kas.de/amman

Event: Regional Workshop

Date/Place: July 3rd and 4th 2010, KAS Amman Office, Jordan

Concept: Dr. Amira Mustafa, Dr. Martin Beck

Organisation: KAS Amman Office, Arab World Center for Democratic Development (UNIHRD)

Saturday, July 3rd, 2010

Opening Session: Welcome Speech

Konrad Adenauer Stiftung
Amman – Jordan

Dr. Martin Beck
Resident Representative

Arab World Center for Democratic
Development
Amman - Jordan

Dr. Amira Mustafa
Executive Director

Session I

The Importance and Significance of the
Upcoming Elections

Dr. Amjad Al-Shraideh
Judge, North Amman Court
Amman-Jordan

Different Electoral Systems and the
Jordanian Regime

Mr. Rebhi Etwi
Lawyer and Chairman of Mesaq Association
for Human Rights
Amman – Jordan

Political Participation of
Women and Minorities

Dr. Amjad Al-Shraideh
Judge, North Amman Court
Amman-Jordan

Youth Participation in the Jordanian
Elections

Mr. Ayoub Mohammed Nammour
Ms. Ala'a Burhan Arafat,
Al-Hayat Center,
Amman - Jordan

Sunday, July 4th, 2010

Session II

Summary of the previous workshop day

Ms. Ala'a Mohammed
Project Coordinator, Arab Foundation for
Development and Citizenship
Amman - Jordan

Question and Answer Session

Mr. Rouman Hadad
Writer and Journalist
Amman – Jordan

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Online Skills of Surveillance

Mr. Rouman Hadad
Writer and Journalist
Amman – Jordan

Designing Blogs for Covering the Elections

Dr. Sakher Khasawneh
Attorney at law
Amman - Jordan

How to Design a Blog and Making it Popular

Ms. Ala'a Mohammed
Project Coordinator, Arab Foundation for
Development and Citizenship
Amman - Jordan

Presentation of the Implementation Plan

Dr. Amira Mustafa
Executive Director of UNIHRD
Amman - Jordan

2. Objective

The Jordanian population is a very young one: 50% of Jordanians are below the age of 20. Many young people are very active in the World Wide Web: Besides social networks like Facebook and Twitter, blogging rapidly gained in popularity. However, the contents which are delivered by blogs differ a lot. Besides personal blogs, which are the most common ones, politically motivated blogs have become increasingly popular. The Konrad Adenauer Stiftung sees a high political potential in this new form of political participation. For this reason KAS Amman in cooperation with the Arab World Center for Democratic Development and Human Rights (UNIHRD) decided to organize a workshop entitled "Bloggers for elections' observation" on July 3rd and 4th, 2010.

This topic was chosen because of current political developments in Jordan: On November 2009, His Majesty King Abdullah II dissolved the Jordanian parliament. The transitional government under Prime Minister Samir Rifai was appointed to create a new electoral law for the upcoming elections on November 9th, 2010. The new electoral law was announced on June 8th, 2010 and included some modifications of the former electoral law. Thus, the goal of the conference was to inform young Jordanian blog-

gers about the new electoral law and the upcoming elections to increase their political awareness. Therefore, the workshop was organized to shed light on different aspects of the electoral law and process. Last but not least, the workshop was supposed to teach bloggers how to exercise their democratic rights of political participation. In addition to that, the participants learnt how to design a blog about the upcoming elections and make it popular. The 35 participants of different parts of Jordan were chosen because of their outstanding skills, experiences and commitment. They were trained by distinguished experts from different fields.

3. Details

Dr. Martin Beck, the Resident Representative of Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) in Amman, opened the workshop. In his welcoming speech he outlined one of the general goals of the KAS, namely to encourage the political education of youth and to support democratic values. The political education of youth should lead to an increase of their political awareness, so that they participate more actively in political processes. These measures should encourage young people to participate in politics. Moreover, **Dr. Martin Beck** then summarized the

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main points of the new electoral law. He finished his welcoming speech by expressing his pleasure to welcome the experts and participants.

Dr. Amira Mustafa, Chief Executive Officer of the Arab World Center for Democratic Development and Human Rights, began her welcoming speech with an introduction of her organization. Then she underlined the important role of the media for democratic processes. Since bloggers are becoming a bigger part of the media, it is very important to train these bloggers in their political awareness.

After the welcoming speeches, **Dr. Amjad Al-Shraideh**, judge at the North Amman Court, began the first session of the workshop. He talked about the importance and the significance of the upcoming elections. He began his lecture by underlining the intentions of His Majesty King Abdullah II to conduct transparent and fair elections that reflect the will of the voters. In addition to that, King Abdullah stressed that the elections should be held in a climate which is dominated by decentralization and which should enhance the political participation of all members of the Jordanian society, especially the participation of women in the parliament. **Dr. Amjad Al-Shraideh** analyzed the new electoral law and stressed that there are obviously huge differences between the current electoral law and the previous one. In his point of view, the most obvious difference is the creation of virtual districts. While the 2001 temporary electoral law created 45 districts, the current electoral law created additionally 108 subareas. Another crucial difference is the women quota, which was doubled from six seats to twelve seats. Moreover the new law focuses on the abolishment of corruption, so that intensive penalties will be imposed on those who committed these crimes. He also mentioned that the new electoral law is only

a temporal law which has to be confirmed by the upcoming parliament.

After the lecture, **Dr. Amjad Al-Shraideh** discussed the issue of political awareness of the young generation with the participants. In his point of view, there is a lack of political awareness in the Jordanian society in general, but especially among young people. Therefore, he underlined the importance of promoting this awareness through conferences like this. Besides this it is also important to inform particularly students about the candidates, so that they vote for a candidate who is representing them properly.

The second speaker was the lawyer **Rebhi Etwi**, who is the manager of the Mithaq Center for Development and Human Rights. He talked about the different electoral systems and the Jordanian regime. He began with underlining the crucial meaning of the voting right and of a parliament which is representing the peoples' views. In this context, he quoted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states in Article 21, that everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives. Moreover everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his or her country. Additionally, the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government, expressed in periodic democratic elections.

Subsequently, **Mr. Rebhi Etwi** also talked about criteria to assess the electoral system. He named voters' representation, the stability of the government and its efficiency, the accountability of the government, the accountability of the elected individuals, encouraging political parties and empowering the opposition and the legislative monitoring.

Furthermore, he introduced a categorization of electoral systems which consists of three types: the majority system, the proportional

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representation system and the mixed system. 91 countries in the world adopted the majority system for legislative elections, 72 countries the proportional representation and 30 countries adopted the mixed system.

Referring to the situation in Jordan, **Mr. Rebhi Etwi** explained the general electoral system, which was introduced by royal decree for the 1993 general elections by His Majesty King Hussein. He decided to maintain the multi-member districts, but changed the law to one where voters could only choose one candidate in their district. Thus Jordan adopted the Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV). In the Jordanian context SNTV is called "one man, one vote", even though this terminology in other countries is primarily used to indicate the fundamental principle of equality between voters rather than a particular electoral system.

After that, **Dr. Amjad Al-Shraideh** talked about the political participation of women and minorities. He elaborated on the next elections, which will be held under the new temporary electoral law, while focusing on the importance of political parties.

He then focused on the participation of various parties in the upcoming elections. He stated that the representation of different groups (e.g. women, Circassians etc.) has improved since the introduction of the "one man-one vote" system. Jordanian Women were granted the right to vote in 1974. Since parliament was suspended in the 1970s and 1980s, the first parliamentary elections in which women voted were held in 1989. During the second legislative elections in 1993, two women ran for parliament, and one, Tujan al-Faysal, won a seat. The government first introduced a six-seat women's quota ahead of the 2003 parliamentary elections. Four years later, seven women were elected to the Lower House:

Six via the quota system, and the seventh through direct elections. Before the quota was introduced, only two women had ever served in the Lower House: Tujan al-Faysal and Nuha Maaytah, who gained a seat through parliamentary by-elections in 2001.

The first session ended with the lecture of two young bloggers, who talked about their experiences. The presentation of **Mr. Ayoub Nammour** and **Ms. Ala'a Arafat**, who work with the Al-Hayat Center, was about "Youth Participation in the Jordanian election". They were underlining the fact that the youth represent the majority in Jordan and are the hope and promise to a new political age of free elections and civil rights. They made very clear that the empowerment of democracy in any community should be treated as a lifestyle and not just a concept of thought. The biggest impact of democracy and its exercise is to assure freedoms along with spreading awareness of everyone's rights and responsibilities. They showed the participants how to participate and underlined the importance of observing elections, encouraging others to participate in elections, joining a candidate's campaign and supporting him and to elect a candidate.

The second day of the workshop on July 4th, 2010 focused on different ways of blogging. It started with **Ms. Ala'a Mohammed**, who works at the Arab World Center for Democratic Development and Human Rights (UNIHRD). She summarized the previous workshop day and emphasized the differences between the new and old electoral law. In addition to that, she underlined the importance to include the youth into political processes, so that young people can contribute their ideas and thoughts to the political development in Jordan. She concluded that the political awareness of bloggers should be improved to create more fruitful and useful blogs.

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Subsequently **Mr. Rouman Hadad** discussed questions and answers with the participants. The most central questions were the following: Why do bloggers observe? Who will they observe? How can they be neutral in observing? What are the basic principles for election observation? **Mr. Rouman Hadad** discussed these questions with the participants in an interactive way, so that the young bloggers could contribute with their knowledge, experiences and ideas. He began his session by asking about the degree of activity of the participants. This revealed the fact that many of the participants are very active on their blogs, but also that some of them have a blog without working on it that often. He encouraged the rather passive minority to make use of their right to express their opinion through their blogs. In his point of view, it is very important to ensure the quality of their blogs, by being well informed about the electoral law, for instance. He also stressed the need of political bloggers to know the proper terminology so that they reach their audience.

After that, he began to discuss the questions mentioned above. Regarding their points of view, bloggers observe mainly because blogs give the opportunity to express opinions without being restricted. **Mr. Rouman Hadad** told the participants that mainly government officials, citizens and candidates will be observed. The possibilities to be neutral while observing was the issue of the next question, which were discussed by the participants. According to the trainer and the participants the neutrality of the blogs can be guaranteed when the bloggers inform themselves as well as possible. He finished by discussing the basic principles for election observation, namely training, expertise, neutrality, speed and accuracy.

Mr. Rouman Hadad ended his speech with lecturing about "Online Skills of Surveillance: Network Security and Tactical Skills".

He began with network security by naming different measures for obtaining network security, namely determining the geographical scope of the blogger who is observing, the networking with other bloggers, collecting information, direct observation, gathering different statements and receiving complaints. Hence, **Mr. Rouman Hadad** talked about online skills of surveillance, namely tactical skills. In his point of view, blogging is an important tactical skill, which comprises not only writing, but also polls, pictures and multimedia.

Regarding network security **Mr. Rouman Hadad's** said that network security can not be 100% safe. Nevertheless, we should always aspire to reach this 100% by implementing some measures that will help making the network as secure as possible. One of these measures is to protect the computers adequately from hackers and from DDoS (Distributed Denial of Service), which is when someone attempts to make a computer resource unavailable to its intended users. Thereafter, **Mr. Rouman Hadad** pointed out some measures to reduce the risk of default setting: SSID or Service Set Identifier, MAC or Address Media Access Control Address, WEP or Wired Equivalent Privacy.

Dr. Sakher Khasawneh lectured on "Designing Blogs for Covering the Elections". He explained that blogging is a means to express opinions and ideas. The inputs of blogs vary according to the interests of the bloggers and according to the means of expression: writing, graphics, images or video clips. Regarding the blogging about elections **Dr. Sakher Khasawneh** stressed the needs for a successful blogging: Gathering all information material and analysis, interviews, debates, dialogues and investigations, participating in conferences and meetings. He reminded the participants that reporting on the elections is free of charge within the regular programs or special insti-

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tutions or private or public audio-visual media. This makes it very easy to disseminate information about the elections via media, for instance printed newspaper and magazines. **Dr. Sakher Khasawneh** underlined also the need of bloggers to work very precisely to ensure the accuracy of their information and news before they get published. For this purpose, the blogger has to take into account all information and news in an objective way, without prejudice. In this context, he mentioned that there are some aspects to consider regarding the freedom of opinion and expression. This means mainly the respect of the rights and reputation of others.

Ms. Ala'a Mohammed focused in her presentation on how to design a blog and make it popular by using many different methods. The most important answer to her question was accuracy, which means that bloggers should write about an event immediately after it happened. Another rule is the use of a proper language, depending on the target audience.

Dr. Amira Mustafa presented an implementation plan, after the participants had learned a lot about blogging and the Jordanian elections and election law. She suggested creating now a blog on which every participant of the conference should contribute. On this blog they should implement all information and methods learned in the two-day workshop so that other young people in Jordan can benefit from it as well.

4. Conclusion

The two day workshop covered a very current issue which is very important to the future of Jordan's democracy. It was a unique chance for young people in Jordan to be taught by high-ranking and renowned trainers who are experts in their respective field and offered the young participants different perspectives. At the same time, the experts had the chance to exchange ideas

and discuss issues with youths who are very active and highly experienced.

The workshop connected two issues, namely blogging and the upcoming elections, to create a fruitful discussion with a high potential to contribute to the democratization processes in Jordan.

The feedback of the workshop was positive. The participants and trainers expressed their interest for follow-up events. Besides, the plan to work on a shared blog about the upcoming parliamentary elections in November 2010 will ensure sustainability of the event. There might be another meeting held right before the elections to present the achieved results and to discuss how to proceed.