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School Curricula and Textbooks

June 16, 2015

DR. OTMAR OEHRING
AFAF MARAQA

Event: Workshop

Date, Place: June 16, 2015, Jerusalem International Hotel,
Amman-Jordan

www.kas.de/amman

Organization: KAS Jordan Office, Nisan Center for Political and Parliamentary Development



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The Forth workshop of the "Nisan Center Forum for Policy Dialogue", a program supported by Konrad Adenauer Foundation was held on June 16, 2015 in Amman – at Jerusalem Hotel with the participation of about 65 people, as well as a the former Prime Minister Mr. Marouf Al-Bakhit , university professors, teachers, religious figures, political parties interested people & activists in this field.

The current school curriculum not only fails to teach coexistence, tolerance and respect for others, but also instils extremist thought in the minds of the younger generation, education specialists said in a recent seminar on school textbooks.

Thougan Obeidat — an author who has examined the school textbooks for Arabic, as well as Islamic, national and civic education —highlighted the absence of teaching free and critical thinking and philosophy."Our books sadly neglect music, logic and scientific thinking," which are important tools to counter extremist ideologies, Obeidat said.

A veteran educator, author and columnist, Husni Ayeshe noted that although the Education Ministry is trying to implement the right values in the curriculum, the issue is about how to make these values part of young people's daily lives.

Bakhit said that fighting extremism should start from within, as religious institutions cannot alone counter extremists, whom he called "the forces of darkness".

He noted extremists promote their own interpretation of religion that contradicts true Islam and its call for moderation and tolerance.

Bakhit added that one solution is to empower the educational system, especially in the early stages, and inject textbooks with

the values of tolerance and acceptance of the other through "teaching art and music and drama classes, in addition to producing animated films where heroes are moderate, tolerant and accepting". "There is an urgent need for collective efforts to screen the Islamic religion and save it from all the myths that have weighed it down for such a long time," the former premier said.

Wafa Abdullat, director of the Education Ministry's Curricula Department, gave a presentation outlining the ministry's efforts in developing school curricula, especially the first three grades. She noted that values like integrity, honesty, respect for others, the rights and duties of citizenship and volunteerism are promoted in the ministry's textbooks.

On the other hand, Dalal Salameh, a teacher and education specialist, who reviewed the improved books for the first three grades, told the participants that students in these early stages of life learn that values such as tolerance, respect, compassion, sacrifice and charity are "limited to and exclusive to the followers of the Islam".

Salameh said students learn about the Bible, the Old Testament, and the Koran but are taught that the only authentic holy book is the Koran.

Among the speakers was Amer Al Hafi, academic adviser at the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies, who said the seminar is not against the Education Ministry or any religion, but against whatever stands in the way of any society's advancement. The scholar and interfaith expert noted that Islam is not the problem, but the issue is the wrong way of interpreting and applying this faith.

Father Rifat Bader, director of the Catholic Centre for Research and Media, said text-

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books neglect Christian history and religion, and history books are full of "factual errors that lead students to disrespect Jordanian Christians".

"I wonder why the [12th grade] textbooks insist on describing the Qumran manuscripts [Dead Sea scrolls] as paving the way for the advent of Islam, and neglect to mention that they are really the authentic manuscripts from the Bible," Bader told The Jordan Times.

CONCLUSIONS:

- 1- Majority of the participants and discussions agreed on the need of a quick review of the Curricula & textbooks.
- 2- Many of them emphasized on the need of adding different subjects on the curricula such as philosophy and logic with a concentration on drama, art and sports.
- 3- There should be a quick review on the personnel and specialist in putting those curricula and textbooks.

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