**Regional Dialogue Forum**

**around**

**The future of education and education on human rights in the Arab region:**

**for a new social contract**

**Egypt - 18-19 October 2023**

**Concept Note**

**Context:**

1. **The Future of Education in the Arab Region**

Education is known as the base for building knowledge and skills, supporting competencies of interaction with others, and preparing young people to access the labor market and face the difficulties of life. Therefore, states, civil society organizations and international organizations seek to support the education sector and to raise the capabilities of those who watch over it.

This is especially after the health crisis showed the importance of education and its role in social cohesion and the process of building a prosperous future, as the crisis has aggravated an imbalance in education with the frequent processes of total and partial closure of schools, especially in most Arab countries, where school closures lasted longer compared to high-income countries. In addition to the weak response to the challenges of closure by developing supplies and means of connectivity through the Internet and supporting caregivers and parents.

Younger students and those with disabilities suffered largely from countries' policy responses that were disproportionate to challenges. Girls faced additional barriers that limited their ability to learning when the schools closed especially from aspects such as social norms, lack of digital skills, and lack of electronic devices.

These challenges and barriers have created a state of fragility in the education systems in the Arab countries, which made educational actors take the initiative to focus on the issue of the right to education within aspects such as priorities of policies, directions of action, allocation of the necessary efforts and resources, as well as proposing policies that can reduce the proportion of children deprived of education by thinking about the development of a new social contract for education based on promoting the integration of human rights education and supporting the human rights dimension in pedagogical[[1]](#footnote-1) approaches and in the management of educational institutions.

Many political actors and civil society activists agree on the need to include reforms in the educational system. This process cannot be effective without foreseeing the future and identifying the nature of the challenges posed locally, regionally, and internationally. The scientific studies carried out must be complemented by targeted research programs and community discussions that include the human rights dimension at the heart of educational and pedagogical policies. In addition to the importance of including education in the field of human rights, which is one of the necessary entrances and foundations that would ensure the quality of education.

In July 2019, UNESCO launched a global initiative to establish a high-level international body to envision the future of education by 2050. The international body is comprised of a group of prominent experts and opinion makers from the worlds of politics, businesses, arts, humanities, civil society, academic fields, and education.

The Committee relied on extensive consultations during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led it to issue recommendations[[2]](#footnote-2) for this exceptional situation. The final report was released on 10 November 2021 and states:

"This report by the International Commission on the future of education calls on governments, institutions, organizations and citizens around the world to forge a new social contract for education that will help us build a peaceful, just and sustainable future together and for all.

The report takes an in-depth look at digital technology, climate change, democratic decline, societal polarization, and job uncertainty. The report not only aims to open dialogue on education for all and stimulate relevant ideas, but also urges each of us to act. The report argues that first and foremost, through individual and collective actions of courage, leadership, resistance, creativity and care, we can change the course and bring about a radical transformation in education that enables us to build a fair, equitable and sustainable future.[[3]](#footnote-3) "

It is natural that this report receives the attention of civil society, UN agencies, national institutions, international organizations, and all actors in the field of education because of their common interest in improving education and foreseeing the future in light of the logistical, pedagogical and value challenges posed.

The ministries of education in the Arab countries are also concerned with the outputs of the report of the high-level body because it includes thinking about educational reform in a universal horizon, and monitors good practices in building active citizenship and in managing educational affairs according to an approach that seeks to resist marginalization, devotes equality, and educates on human rights and citizenship in a way that promotes the implementation of the fourth goal of sustainable development quality education "so that no one is left behind". As it is important to benefit from the report's outputs and try to integrate them into reform approaches in light of local contexts.

On 13 and 14 May 2022, the Arab Institute for Human Rights, within the framework of its annual seminars on education, organized the regional seminar "The Future of Education in the Arab Countries: Policies, Approaches and Action Directions" in partnership with the Arab Organization for Human Rights, the Arab Lawyers Union, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Tunisia, UNESCO, the Tunisian League for the Defense of Human Rights, and the Arab NGO Network for Development.

This seminar was an opportunity to deepen the discussion on the report issued by UNESCO entitled "Reimagining our future together: a new social contract for education" and to reflect on the future steps to activate it. This was done in the workshops organized during this seminar with various actors in the educational field from a number of Arab countries. Among the most important recommendations contained in the final statement of the symposium is to hold a series of regional consultations on the future of education in order to conceptualize a new social contract for education in the Arab countries.

In September 2022, the Education Transformation Summit was held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, in response to the global crisis in education that suffers from a crisis of equality, funding and quality. The report of the International Commission on the Future of Education also presented the development of concepts of a new social contract for our future with education, in the presence of all ministries of education in the world and civil society organizations that pay attention to education and youth issues. One of the recommendations of this summit to governments and all educational actors was to organize participatory consultations on the report in the presence of all stakeholders in education in order to develop a common collective thinking on improving the quality of education, using the report as a reference for reflection, dialogue and action**.**

1. **Education and Human Rights**

Human rights education contributes to ensuring respect for and realization of human rights as well as to the establishment of stable relations, understanding, tolerance and world peace within societies and among States, through the tools, values, and principles it instills that contribute to standing up to injustice, corruption, repression, and human rights violations. This helps to better respect and safeguard human rights and freedoms. Human rights education is a lifelong process aimed at enhancing knowledge, skills, and behavior.

The call for action on human rights education was greatly witnessed by the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Conference on Human Rights (1993), which recognized the World Plan of Action on Education for Human Rights and Democracy, adopted by the International Conference on Education for Human Rights and Democracy (1993). It also called on all States and institutions to include human rights, humanitarian law, democracy and the rule of law as subjects in the curricula of all educational institutions in the formal and non-formal education systems. The General Assembly also adopted the “United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training” (2011)[[4]](#footnote-4).

The General Assembly then proclaimed the World Programme for Human Rights Education, which aims at promoting the implementation of human rights education programmes in all sectors and is organized in sequential phases[[5]](#footnote-5). OHCHR coordinates the World Programme for Human Rights Education.

In December 2022, the High Commissioner for Human Rights launched an initiative to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which lasts for a year (until December 2023). Since then, OHCHR has issued a series of initiatives calling on States and all other States to take a series of pledges and clear steps to deliver on the promises contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed that he "strongly hopes that the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights will provide space and inspiration for all of us to return to the basics – to find the roots of human rights values in our cultures, history, and religions, as well as to unite us in addressing the exploitation and politicization of human rights within and among countries"[[6]](#footnote-6).

The League of Arab States has also worked to merge the "Arab Plan for Human Rights Education 2009-2014" and the "The Arab Plan for promoting the Culture of Human Rights 2011-2015" into a unified plan, the “Arab Plan for Human Rights Education 2022-2026”. The League of Arab States attributes great care and attention to consolidating a culture of human rights , this includes education and training efforts that prioritize all individual and collective rights, including the right to being different, respecting others and solidarity, and the efforts to secure the desired change in the behaviors and convictions of individuals and institutions to ensure conscious and responsible engagement in the implementation of human rights principles and values. This is in accordance with the basic purposes of the relevant Arab and UN charters, which are to promote and achieve stable and harmonious relations between societies and to consolidate mutual understanding, tolerance, and peace. Seeking to reconcile universality and privacy by invoking the context of digital transformation, creating Arab models aimed at involving governmental and non-governmental actors in order to consolidate, balance and coordinate efforts linked to the promotion of a culture of human rights within the framework of a vision that achieves harmony, integration and sustainability, and provides conditions for creativity and adaptation to the evolving requirements of education. It should be noted that the preamble of the Arab Charter on Human Rights included the pride of Arab nations of the humanitarian values and principles that the Arab nation has established throughout its long history, which have played a major role in spreading knowledge between East and West, so making the region a point of reference for the whole world and a destination for seekers of knowledge and wisdom”.

In the same context, the Arab Network of National Human Rights Institutions has included work on the subject of developing education as well as spreading the culture of human rights and education in its strategic plan. By including this every year in the operational plan of the Arab Network emanating from the network's strategic plan, which includes five years from the beginning of 2020 until the end of 2024, where the operational plan adopted outputs and activities that work to spread the culture of human rights. This plan, through which the Network is open to cooperation with all stakeholders by intensifying and dedicating international cooperation, to achieve the Network's conviction and belief in the steady relationship between the promotion of human rights as well as human rights education and awareness, which contributes to changing convictions to change attitudes towards these rights. This is essential and urgent for the Arab States, given the transformations that the Arab region has witnessed during the last ten years which were created due to lack of awareness, ignorance of human rights, hate speech, non-acceptance of the other, and rejection of dialogue.

1. **The general objective of the forum:**

The future of education and education on human rights towards a new social contract.

1. **Objectives of the Forum:**

- Introduction to the report of the International Commission on the Future of Education: "Reimagining our future together: a new social contract for education".

-Discuss the elements of preparing a new social contract on education in the Arab countries.

-Promote the integration of human rights education into educational curricula.

- Introduction to the Arab plan for education in the field of human rights 2022-2026.

- Identify the most important trends and methodologies to prepare a vision for the development of education in a changing world.

- Supporting the human rights dimension in pedagogical approaches and in the management of educational institutions.

1. **Main Themes:**

1. Report of the International Commission on the Future of Education: Envisioning a new social contract for our future with education: contexts, methodology and key recommendations.

2. Promote the integration of human rights education into educational curricula.

3. The role of education in achieving the well-being of the learner.

4. Insights and recommendations for the future of education.

1. **Participating entities and institutions:**

Approximately (200) participants from stakeholders, specialists, and representatives of regional, international and UN organizations concerned, and from the competent authorities in the subject of the forum in the Arab countries will be invited to participate in the forum, according to the following:

* The concerned authorities in the joint Arab action system.

− Ministries of Education in the Arab countries.

− National human rights institutions.

− United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

− Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

− UN organizations.

− Networks working in the field of education.

− Associations active in the field of education and human rights.

− Journalists and media professionals interested in the field of education.

− Youth and childhood organizations.

− New technology organizations and associations.

− Associations of people with disabilities.

− Representatives of the private education sector.

− University students and workers in research centers.

− Donor institutions in the field of education.

1. **Organizing the regional forum**

In this context, and in the interest of the organizers to hold regional consultations to discuss the future of education and education on human rights which coinciding with the celebration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the thirtieth anniversary of the Vienna Programme of Action, a regional dialogue forum will be organized in cooperation with actors and stakeholders in the Arab region.

1. Forum Date: 18-19 October 2023
2. Location: Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt
3. Organizers: Arab Network of National Human Rights Institutions, Arab Institute for Human Rights, UNESCO, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (United Nations Human Rights Training and Documentation Centre for South-West Asia and the Arab Region, OHCHR Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa and Middle East Section of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva), and the National Council for Human Rights in Egypt, in cooperation with the League of Arab States.
4. Media and Communication:

Media professionals will be invited to attend and cover the forum as well as live streaming on social media for the opening and closing sessions in addition to the three main sessions.

1. Forum approach (format and methodology)

The forum is designed in the form of presenting working papers, discussion sessions, presenting real-life experiences and workshops, and participation will take place in person and remotely. The Forum will consist of an opening session, three main sessions, three working groups and a results session. Each session and working group will have a chair and a rapporteur, a report will be presented at the end of the forum on the issues discussed and a summary of good practices and initiatives of the participating parties, where the proceedings of the forum will be conducted according to the attached program. Noting that there will be three working groups focusing on the following topics:

- Working Group 1: The role of education in achieving the well-being of the learner.

- Working Group 2: Visions and recommendations for the future of education, including human rights education.

- Working Group 3: Directions and methodologies for preparing a vision for the development of education in a changing world.

The proceedings of the two-day forum will take place according to the program that will be provided as soon as possible.

1. Definition of pedagogy: It is the science concerned with the principles and methods of teaching, including the objectives and methods that can be followed in order to achieve those goals. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. UNESCO, Policy Brief: Education during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, August 2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. UNESCO - Report of the International Commission on the Futures of Education, Envisioning a new social contract for our future with education, 2021: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379381_ara?7=null&queryId=N-EXPLORE-dbe07ec1-efdb-4c09-893f-1f7f371539b8> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Which emphasizes that States and, as appropriate, competent governmental authorities have the primary responsibility for promoting and ensuring human rights education and training, and that States must create a safe and enabling environment for the involvement of civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders in these processes. This was preceded by the UNESCO Recommendation on Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace and Education in Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1974), a global instrument dedicated to human rights education. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The first phase of the Programme (2005-2009) was devoted to the integration of human rights education into the primary and secondary school systems; The third phase (2015-2019) focused on strengthening the implementation of the first two phases and strengthening human rights training for media professionals and journalists, while the fourth and current phase (2020-2024) focused on empowering youth through human rights education. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Opening remarks by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk at his press conference at the United Nations in Geneva on May 24, 2023 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)