

A personal reflection on the International Seminar on Human Rights and Freedom of Religion & Beliefs; Amman, Jordan, August 18-26, 2008

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Being from a country whose name is listed among the top rankings of human rights violations, and attending a conference that focuses on human rights and freedom of religion in an effort to learn more in detail the aspects of individual's rights and how to implement them in my society, was one of the most challenging things, from the thought and mind perspective.

At first, hearing about the conference being held in our region, specifically for young people, alerted the interest and enthusiasm in me, as for many reasons I had only been able to contribute a little in human rights protection in my country. One of the obstacles has always been finding a way to protect those rights without putting myself or others in danger, as many human rights activists are being arrested in Iran every year.

This conference came up as an opportunity to open doors to me to overcome such obstacles and do something for my society's openness and human rights observations, to the best of my ability. So, I packed and travelled!

Arriving at the meeting's first session, an official welcoming, I could see the diversity in a glance around, which is very important in the process of sharing and learning such subjects of today's concern. Although I hoped there could be people of all other non-represented countries as well, the presented diversity was relatively fair. The young people started getting to know each other in effective game-like practices. The interactive methods of getting to know each other were well chosen in order to manifest the personal, educational and professional characteristics and skill of each person, to break ice between the young participants - to get closer as well as facilitate sharing professional experiences.

The sessions were continued over the next days with team-buildings and more experience-sharing among the team members. By now, young participants knew each other better, and were ready to enter into discussions of how to join forces and experiences for a better practice of human rights in each of their societies, and globally.

I was very happy to find sessions were held in an effective, friendly and yet educational way that actually motivated the participants to be more active. The session on introducing human rights by interactive practices allowed participants to speak their minds on what they believe human rights is, and how it should be practiced. The different opinions and perspectives were tabled and discussed well, and the participants could see how far it can go when it comes to human rights in each society.

The discussions became deeper by each day, so that participants could learn the most from each other's experiences.

Besides these sessions and discussions, the intercultural practices and events are worth mentioning, as they help understanding the values in different cultures to prevent misunderstandings as the pillar for any dialogue of cultures that is among the first steps of human rights understanding and observation.

One of the most effective and helpful sessions was the introduction of UDHR and human rights monitoring. Although a bit long and exhausting, I believe the session was very essential and helpful in comprehending the UN Human Rights bodies and its works as the major international body to watch the human rights observations and take the necessary actions wherever and whenever required.

The participant groups could now move swiftly but smoothly to the next discussions on implementation of human rights, sharing some actual experiences and developing new models. In the meantime, the production groups had already started working on what was divided into videos, photos, newsletter and HR and FR models of practices.

In the informal evenings the participants were more than happy to share rather more personal stories related to their achievements, and to some extent to the human rights practices they have had; or, even sharing their dreams about what they wish to change in their societies in order to bring human rights into practice. Such informal conversations, I believe, are even very useful in acquiring the skills needed.

Overall, the participants learned some of the essential tools which they need in order to be able to make a change in the way human rights is observed in their communities. The conference, as I saw it, was a unique opportunity for me to learn mainly the UN functions on human rights. Surely, this short note cannot cover all the discussions and sessions, but the groups' productions will say and show a lot.

The participants are now ready to move on to the next steps, and organize the models they have developed. Together, we can surely make a bigger change in the world!