

WFP Lebanon: Youth Education For A Future Of Peace In The Middle East

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Coinciding with the International Day of the Girl Child, the 27th Women's Conference for Peace in the Middle East was organized in two sessions on October 11. The first session was a round table discussion between the panelists and the second celebrated the 30th anniversary of Women's Federation for World Peace.

I had the pleasure to be the Keynote Speaker of the first session, exposing the issues that the youth of the Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA) region have in their quest for a bright future. Afterward, seasoned educators, Dr. Siham Anees Kawaar from Jordan and Mrs. Moyassara Al-Falah from Kuwait, exposed the realities of today's education. My presentation mainly focused on three main parts,

1. Education - Three key elements
2. Challenges - Etiology and Avoidance
3. The outcome we aspire

I started with a quote by Allan Bloom, who was a philosopher, classicist, political theorist, and critic of higher education: "education is the movement from darkness to light." This was the core of our theme.

Next, I explained how "Education is the cornerstone for building a healthy society and ensuring a bright and prosperous future. Education impacts reducing illiteracy and the family, by raising awareness of the different issues in family care. When we talk about education, we mainly talk about three main keys: The curriculum, the educators, and the students, which are the starting point of a limitless discussion and raise the topic concerning the family. In general, the family plays a very important role, as it plays a quintessential part in a child's education. Providing a happy and positively growing environment has proven to be extremely beneficial in bettering the child's mindset and cognitive mind."

"It is not unfamiliar to anyone who is from or lives in the MENA region to face all kinds of challenges: economic, political, social, and all their ramifications that result. It is important also, to raise the point of practicing harmful traditional practices that enhance and justify all forms of discrimination, like minor marriage and child labor. All these challenges can be avoided, through education from A to Z (from nursery-higher education)."

I also raised the point of how it is important for both children and adolescents to have access to opportunities to learn and develop skills needed to earn a dignified living. In this way, we can unleash their potential to be change makers.

Coming to the government's role, I raised the point of how they should start evolving and implementing

an accessible educational system, targeting the most vulnerable, youth and children who are victims of harmful traditional practices, and families who suffer from hard financial status.

Furthermore, I spoke on the need to develop a special educational curriculum for illiterate family members especially "moms," in addition to adopting more evolved systems like STEM programs and presenting up-to-date majors to create new jobs to absorb the large youth population entering the labor market. I pointed out that all the above cannot be achieved unless politics and politicians are excluded from the education field.



I concluded by stating, "Education is more than just books, schools, and information are given to students. On the contrary, the lofty and desired goal of education is culture. A culture of thought, personality, the creation of people of quality, implementing equal consideration to both gender's roles, the love to do good and most importantly, work to serve the family, our big family, and our big home, which is the human family and the whole world, to achieve peace."

Next, Dr. Siham Kawaar, member of the Al-Fuhies Municipality Council, Director of the Jordanian Women's Village Association- an international trainer in mediation and conflict resolution and psychology and education counselor from Amman, Jordan, raised several points starting with the importance of educating youth. Mrs. Kawaar also explained how Jordanian society is considered a "young community." Jordan is also one of the first countries that signed the International Charter of Cultural, Social, and Economic Rights, which prioritizes education and changing ideologies. In addition to that, international policies and legislations impact schools' curricula, especially in the Middle East. She also explained how important it is to study more about the structure of the educational system and its aspects. She listed the elements of the educational process and its development. Furthermore, she explained the role of school principals and of parents. She also pointed out the obstacles that hinder parents' participation in scholastic educational planning. Mrs. Kawaar ended her speech with an inspiring message: "It is time for communities to take action towards peace, especially among young people who are our future leaders. This can be achieved through replacing war mentality with peace and prosperity in all sectors of society."

Our final speaker was Mrs. Moyassara Al-Falah, a former assistant secretary of scholarships, equivalences and cultural relationships at the Ministry of Higher Education in Kuwait. Mrs. Al-Falah raised several points, starting with pointing out that "young people are the mainstay of any society and that the future of their country depends on them." Moreover, "young people are the basis around which innovation revolves." Their intelligence and skills are what will allow them to lead the country to development and success. Mrs. Al-Falah also recognized the role the government plays in helping youth in this sector. Moreover, she noted how the government has the duty to include young people in the areas of peace, safety and security. In conclusion, Mrs. Al-Falah remarked that youth are the base of all societies and it is important to keep young people away from any political involvement or pressure that may negatively affect them and their future.

We ended the first round with a Q and A session, where important questions were raised. Also, a young lady from Afghanistan shared how education and girls in Afghanistan are facing a lot of challenges in all aspects. The closure of this round was with a unique and talented Palestinian band that lives in Lebanon.

Part two of the event was very special. We celebrated all together the 30th anniversary of the Women's Federation for World Peace International!

We started the session by listening to a message from the President of WFWPI, Dr. Julia H. Moon. She congratulated all women leaders who "dedicated themselves to creating a better peaceful world in addition to also honoring the effort and sacrifice of our co-founders, leaders, members, and volunteers." She talked about the achievement and impacts WFWPI has made since its founding.

Next, we had the privilege to hear from Mrs. Carolyn Handschin, the Director of the WFWPI Offices for UN Relations and President of NGO CSW Geneva. Mrs. Handschin spoke about the work that WFWP Middle East has been doing and, as she said, "it has completely changed my perspective about the Middle East." She also talked about the girl child, whose protection is a big issue and an item in the work of the United Nations and many NGOs, when facing conflicts and war, starting from Ukraine to the Middle East. She pointed out that it is important to understand how much power there is in the decision of one person, as it affects a large group of people surrounding this person. For this reason, educating the character of young people is the most important. In conclusion, Mrs. Handschin highlighted how leaders should have sympathy, sensitivity, and awareness to lead countries, not just pride.

After Mrs. Handschin, we listened to wonderful memories and projects from women leaders and participants from the previous Middle East Women's Peace Conferences. Dr. Zoe Bennett, the International Vice President of WFWP Middle East, shared a list of all 26 Women's Conferences for Peace in the Middle East, and the projects managed by WFWP International, WFWP Japan, and WFWP Middle East in Gaza, as an example of the humanitarian projects generated by the participants of previous conferences.

At the end of the program, the Global Women Peace Ambassador Award was granted to the longest-standing and most distinguished friends of the conference, and certificates of recognition were given to our new friends!

This conference raised awareness and brought people and hearts closer. It was a great pleasure that I had the chance to participate in such an important project.