



معهد جنيف لحقوق الإنسان والشؤون الإنسانية  
Geneva Institute for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs

# GIHR ANNUAL REPORT 2008

Promoting Human Rights to Effect Change

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## *Message from the Executive Director*

It is with great pleasure that I share with you our annual report for 2008. This report is a testament to the determination and commitment of the Geneva Institute for Human Rights for its work on promoting human rights in the Middle East and African regions. 2008 has been a special year for all human rights activists and organizations as it has also been a celebration for the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary for the Universal Declaration for Human Rights.

For this past year we have made significant strides in raising the profile of our work in the region, gaining the trust and building good relationships with several institutions in varying countries. We pride ourselves in working in the Arab region not as a foreign organization, but as an equal partner that is neutral and part of the region. Whilst there is a lot of work that needs to be done, here are a few of our key achievements.

In April 2008 a major and unique development in the field of human rights was created by the Human Rights Council through the launch of the Universal Periodic Review. The significance of this innovative system is that all human rights records of all UN member states will be reviewed and examined regularly through a common mechanism with no differentiation whatsoever. In 2008, 5 Arab countries have been reviewed, Bahrain, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco and UAE and GIHR actively participated and provided its expertise and technical assistance to the attending governments.

All together, GIHR has worked in 5 countries, including Switzerland, Syria, Sudan, Jordan and Dubai. The work has been both inspiring and encouraging, as most organizations have been very positive about the institutes work. We also believe that it is important to collaborate with other organizations and key partners in order to outreach and ensure that the message of human rights is achieved. Indeed for this year we have partnered with major organizations and institutes through trainings held in various countries.

On the occasion of the International day of Violence against Women, GIHR in collaboration with the Institute of Public Law, University of Bern organized a seminar on 'Women's and Girls' Rights in Islam'. The seminar is the first of a series which the women's rights

department is aiming to conduct, initiating dialogue and discussion amongst different stakeholders and activists on such crucial issues.

It has been a productive period for the Institute, with publishing of six major publications on the general comments of some of the International covenants. We have also developed three advocacy posters for the Syrian Ministry of Interior and are currently working on a major revamp of the website, which will include an Arabic version.

The establishment of an effective human rights mechanism is an integral element of good governance, but for some emerging States it is not an easy task to accomplish. The role of GIHR has become pivotal in translating the meanings and principals of human rights mechanisms and standards to civil society organizations and governmental and non governmental institutions at the grassroots.

One of our major challenges for 2008 has been that the Institutes work has stretched its budget and human resources to the limits. The team at GIHR has worked hard to ensure that we remain within our strict budget limits with positive outcomes. The global financial situation has also limited the funding available for organizations. Despite this, the Institute has managed to deliver more than its originally planned activities through the perseverance and strong commitment of our staff and expert resource persons. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the dedicated team for their dedication to the work of the Institute. We are also gratified and encouraged by the support provided by the Swiss government and our other donors. The support provided has been vital to GIHR's success. Our work could not have been achieved without your help.

Yours Truly

*Nazar Abdelgadir*

Executive Director

## *Mission and Values of GIHR*

### **GIHR Mission**

Geneva Institute for Human Rights (GIHR) is dedicated to the promotion and dissemination of the principals of international human rights to all, through the provision of training, consultation and research services to civil society, governmental and non governmental organizations and other actors in the public and private sphere. The work of GIHR seeks to ensure that the principles of equality, dignity and respect are incorporated into practice and policy at all levels of public service.

### **Our Values**

Dignity and Respect- Every human being is entitled to have their dignity and human rights respected equally whatever their gender, age, religion or disability

Knowledge – knowledge is an asset, through promotion of human rights principals effective social change can occur.

Integrity - Transparency, democracy and integrity are crucial to enable empowerment of the community.

### **About GIHR**

The Geneva Institute for Human Rights is a non-governmental, non-profit organization that is based in Geneva. Since its establishment in 2004, the Institute has provided Human Rights trainings in North Africa and the Middle East to human rights defenders and public institutions, empowering them to access and use International Human Rights procedures, standards and mechanisms. GIHR also delivers consultancy and research services that protect the rights of individuals with a special focus on women and children in the African and Arab Region.

## Key Highlights of 2008

This last year has been an eventful one for GIHR, it has also had International significance for all human rights activists and organizations as it was the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Some of the key highlights of the year were:

Three training courses conducted in Jordan on Human Rights Mechanisms for 59 participants from different Arab Countries, governmental & non governmental organizations & members of civil society

Conducting seven trainings in Geneva including 3 Regional Trainings on Human Rights Mechanisms, and training for the Organization of Islamic Conference, the Sudanese bar Association and collaborating with the Fredreich-Ebert Stiftung (FES) -Geneva

Celebration of the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in collaboration with the Jordanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in a Symposium for 60 participants

*Symposium on the International Criminal Court and the Sudanese President, in Sudan for 500 participants*

Conducting a Seminar on Women's & Girls' Rights in Islam in collaboration with the Institute of Public Law, University of Berne on the International day of Activism on Violence against Women 25th November 2008

*Eight pivotal Human Rights Training Courses with the Syrian Police Force were conducted. A total of 192 police officers have been trained on International Human Rights Principals.*

Design & Publishing of 3 Posters on Advocacy against Torture, and Respect human rights for the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

## *What They Say...*

Letter from the Syrian Ambassador to GIHR's Executive Director

***Dear Mr Nazar***

With the successful completion of the human rights training course for the group of Syrian police force, we would like to personally thank you and the whole management team and experts at the Geneva Institute for Human Rights, our deepest appreciation and real feelings of indebtedness for this important milestone achievement. Such a valuable contribution to an important official Syrian institution cannot be considered less than a breakthrough in the global efforts to boost up awareness, among different stakeholders of the importance of human rights promotion and protection.

***Faisal Khabbaz Hamoui,***

Ambassador, Permanent Representative to Switzerland

## *What We Have Accomplished In 2008*

For 2008, the journey of GIHR has been both challenging and difficult, but the team at GIHR were able to overcome any difficulties faced, through dedication and perseverance. The accomplishments achieved have been surprising as well as encouraging. Despite the limited resources GIHR was able to reach and exceed the original planned activities for 2008.

The Institute has also built and maintained long term relationships and trust with countries in the Middle East and the African Regions. Our work has become crucial as a non political, human rights organization providing the much needed capacity building on international human rights standards and their principals to civil society organizations, governmental and non governmental organizations.

We believe that our work with governmental institutions in particular is detrimental to the realisation of human rights in different countries. We were also able to balance our work so as to make sure that members of civil society organizations were also included in our work, in addition to ensuring that the gender balance was kept within our trainings.

We have passed the year through three crucial steps, **promotion of human rights, promotion of dialogue and promotion of knowledge sharing...**

## *Promoting Human Rights*

“Human rights education is much more than a lesson in schools or a theme for a day; it is a process to equip people with the tools they need to live lives of security and dignity. On this International Human Rights Day, let us continue to work together to develop and nurture in future generations a culture of human rights, to promote freedom, security and peace in all nations.” Kofi Annan, Former UN Secretary General.

Beyond the legal protection of citizens through International, Regional and State laws, there is a need to promote human rights knowledge and information on human rights to all stakeholders in society. Having a law without the understanding of what a human beings right’s are, would not achieve the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which recognized that human rights are, by their nature universal and that every human was entitled to.

To fulfil its role in promoting human rights during 2008 GIHR delivered consultancy and training services to 284 participants from 20 different countries from the Arab region, with the ratio of male to female being 221:63; these included 150 representatives from governmental institutions, 5 from Regional and International organizations and 117 participants from NGOs and human rights defenders, in addition to 12 members of National Human Rights Institutions. We also leveraged our reach by convening the message of human rights to an audience of 560 participants through two Symposia held by the Institute in Jordan and Sudan.

### **Syria**

The work of the Geneva Institute for Human Rights in Syria has been both groundbreaking and unique. GIHR has been the only international human rights organization that has been able to work with such a crucial body as the Syrian Ministry of Interior. The institute has also gained a trusting relationship with the Syrian government through its work with the police force. Due to this the institute has been able to discuss possibilities of future work with other governmental bodies, including the Judicial system and the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs. The main goal of the institute is to work in partnership and collaboration with various stakeholders to achieve human rights for all. As such, it is crucial to our work that the relationships we create in a country our built with trust and transparency.

The activities which GIHR has undertaken for 2008 have included organizing and conducting eight trainings for the Syrian police force, all together the institute has been able to train 192 members of the police force, nearly 50% more than the expected 100 to be trained for the year. From the trainings we have also 7 of the outstanding members whom were trained as trainers.

Currently there is discussion of the Ministry of Interior establishing a Human Rights Unit, which will be responsible for all complaints and procedures and to ensure that the human rights of all citizens are achieved. The seven trained officers whom have been selected as trainers will be situated and responsible for this crucial unit.

GIHR believes that when able to access a country or group we enter it with commitment and perseverance. As such our trainings are usually not just one – off trainings but a partnership which involves constant follow up that will result in sustainability of our work.

## **Sudan**

The future of Sudan is currently unclear as there is lots of speculation on what would happen to the country if the International Criminal Court (ICC) implement their ruling of taking the Sudanese President Omer El-Bashir to a court hearing.

Little is known on what such a hearing might do to the Country, in addition many have shown minimal understanding of the role of the International Criminal Court, as such GIHR held a symposium on the role of the International Criminal Court in Khartoum, Sudan in collaboration with the Umma Party. The symposium was attended by an extremely large audience of 500 participants. A lecture was also held for the purpose of clarification of the role of the ICC.

## **Royal Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan**

In Jordan, GIHR was able to conduct several trainings on International human rights mechanisms and procedures to a diverse audience, including civil society organizations from various Arab countries, governmental and non governmental institutions and human rights defenders.

The geographical location of Jordan has proven ideal in enabling GIHR to reach out to a wider range of audience, promoting human rights through regional trainings in the country. Most organizations had initially stated their interest in attending our Regional trainings that we held in Geneva, but that they were unable to do so due to financial restraints. Thus through bringing the distance of the trainings to a more cost effective location has enabled the attendance of a wider audience and stakeholders. All together four trainings were held in the country for 2008, in addition to a Symposium held in collaboration with the Jordanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to celebrate the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

### **Regional Training Courses in Geneva**

Yearly the Institute conducts three trainings in Geneva, where participants from the Middle East and Northern African Region can attend the fourteen days training courses at the heart of the headquarters of some of the most pivotal International organizations working on human rights. In these courses participants are able to realize how the different UN mechanisms work on international human rights, attending crucial meetings of UN Committees.

The trainings conducted are in collaboration with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. GIHR has been able throughout the years to distinguish its trainings from other organizations by being in both Arabic and English (thus reaching out to a larger group) and by its commitment to networking and continual partnerships. All participants trained receive regular updates and information on International Human Rights.

In 2008, twenty five participants from several Arab countries attended the trainings in Geneva. Two of the trainings coincided with –

- *The meeting of the 47<sup>th</sup> Session of the Child Rights Committee (CRC)*
- *The 7<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council*
- *Two special training courses were also held in Geneva:*

- *A special training course on the role of the United Nations Human Rights Council was conducted for 24 lawyers, from the Sudan, all members of the Sudanese Bar Union.*
- *A special training course on the Role of the Regional Human Rights Mechanisms was held for four senior advisors of the Organization of the Islamic Conference in collaboration with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.*

### **Further Outreach**

GIHR also conducted a further training course that was held in Dubai, organized in collaboration with the Dubai police force, as a follow up to previous work that GIHR conducted. The training was on Human Rights Standards, 19 participants attended the course.

In addition to further extend and reach out to a wider audience, as mentioned above, GIHR held two symposia in Jordan and Sudan, and a lecture in Sudan for 70 participants also in relation to the ICC.

## ***Promoting Dialogue***

‘Dialogue is a means of understanding our own need and our own failure in faith and in gratitude; to see the other, as many have said this morning, as a gift from God to draw us more deeply in our relation with God. And such dialogue is possible only if we begin in that spirit of repentance which tells us that we have much to learn, a long way to travel and a great deal of growing to do.’ The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams.

Establishing dialogue amongst different cultures, religions and societies is detrimental to ensure peace and harmony amongst different societies. In 2008,

On the International day that celebrated Violence Against Women, 25<sup>th</sup> November, GIHR held a Seminar on Women’s and Girls’ Rights in Islam, in cooperation with the Institute of Public Law, University of Bern. The objectives of the seminar were threefold:

- 1. To provide an understanding of the status of women and girls rights in Islam in Muslim countries.***
- 2. To gain an understanding on how Islamic laws including Shariaa and Family laws affect Muslim women and girls in comparison with International Human Rights laws.***
- 3. To provide some answers on inheritance laws, marriage, including polygamy and child marriage, land ownership and some of the practices such as female genital mutilation.***

The speakers for the seminar were renowned Islamic thinkers and activists including Dr Zeinab Radwan from Egypt, the Imam ALSadig AlMahdi from Sudan and Dr Nawal Al-Faouri from Jordan. Chairpersons for the sessions were Professor Walter Kaelin and Dr Brigitte Schnegg from the Institute of Public Law and Dr Elham Manea from the University of Zurich.

The one day seminar was attended by more than 70 participants from different governmental and non governmental institutions including representatives from the Swiss government, representatives from different missions, including Canada, Iran, Egypt, Jordan, Sudan and Finland. In addition there were academics from different universities, representatives from the media and students.

“This seminar has been very positive, the speakers and the organization of this seminar were very good, I am pleased with the outcomes.” Professor Walter Kaelin, Institute of Public Law.

“The seminar has been very inspiring for me and I learnt new information which I have felt has been so useful, I have been honoured to be part of this event.” Dr Brigitte Schnegg, Institute of Public Law.

“Congratulations on such a successful seminar, it was well organized and the discussions of the participants have been excellent.” The Imam AlSadig AlMahdi.

## *Promoting Knowledge Sharing*

“Sharing knowledge is not about giving people something, or getting something from them. That is only valid for information sharing. Sharing knowledge occurs when people are genuinely interested in helping one another develop new capacities for action; it is about creating learning processes.” Dr. Peter Senge, American scientist and director of the Center for Organizational Learning at the MIT Sloan School of Management.

Since its establishment in 2004, one of the main objectives of GIHR has been to be able to share its knowledge and expertise to aid different stakeholders in the region. Our being situated in Switzerland is also unique in enabling us to be at the heart of where the main international human rights organizations are.

Despite our full agenda, GIHR provides its time and expertise to also participate with other organizations in different trainings and events. For 2008 we have collaborated with a wide diversity of organizations and institutions including: Adaleh centre for Human Rights and Raoul Institute for Human Rights in Jordan, Human Rights Information and Training Center and Bahrain Human Rights Society and the Foundation for the Future in Manama Bahrain, Geneva Center for Security Policy and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the NGO liaison office in Geneva, the Arab Speaking Minority Fellowship program in Geneva, and the Human Rights Information and Training Center and the Foundation for the Future in Yemen.

To further promote knowledge sharing on human rights issues it has been crucial for the Institute to be on the top of current and latest issues and events on human rights. As such, we have also participated actively at meetings in the United Nations Human Rights Council and the UN Treaty Monitoring Bodies. Altogether 48 meetings and events in Geneva were attended by GIHR’s Executive Director.

## ***What They Say...***

“We wish for more progress and prosperity for the Geneva Institute for Human Rights, which undoubtedly has proven as a means to achieve noble goals through their tireless efforts to promote the concepts and foundations of human rights. In a world which has become a breeding ground for wars and atrocities carried out by States on the basis of material gains and interests. We fully believe and have faith that through events organized by the Geneva Institute for Human Rights that a cultural monument of intellectual education and training on human rights would be developed, that would help in advancing a culture of human rights around the existing chaos. Undertaking the effective role to refine the image of truth for the conventions and treaties and declarations of global and international rights, which protect from the clutches of infringement sanctioned on a daily basis ... “

***Mr. Hussein Jawad, member of Bahrain Centre for Human Rights***

“This truly has been one of the most important forums that I have participated in. The well founded preparations strived to meet the needs of the participants. The programme has also been well organized. The forum also provided us with an opportunity to network and share experiences with other participants providing a space to share experiences from the field. I personally would like to thank the institute on the excellent care provided and in particular to Mr Nazar who was the steering body behind the event. “

***Dr. Ayit Yahyia Mohand Ouali, University of Algeria***

## ***Resources and Publications***

“Search for the truth is the noblest occupation of man, its publication is a duty.” Madame de Stael, French political activist 1766-1817.

Publications are important tools for outreach. In 2008 we have published the general comments for 6 of the human rights covenants and treaties. These have all been developed in the Arabic language to ensure outreach to a larger community of stakeholders. These include:

- i. Human Rights Committee - General Comments*
- ii. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - General Comments*
- iii. Committee Against Torture General Comments*
- iv. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination - General Comments*
- v. Committee on the Rights of the Child - General Comments*
- vi. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women - General Recommendations*

In addition we have developed 3 advocacy posters for the Syrian Ministry of Interior.

## ***GIHR Team***

### **GIHR Board members**

Chairperson:	Mr. Alain Bovard
Vice Chairperson:	Mr. Mohamed Cherif
Treasurer:	Dr. Karl Hanson
Member:	Mr. Paulo David
Executive Director:	Mr. Nazar Abdelgadir

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Head of Training Unit	Mr. Kamal Ahmed
Head of the Universities Program:	Ms. Anna Saunders
Intern	Ms. Monika Alder
Intern	Ms. Andrea Alder
Administrator:	Mr. Prakash Shahria
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