



2009 - 2010 Model Arab League

BACKGROUND GUIDE

Council on Social Affairs

ALL Regional Model Arab Leagues

(i.e., not the National University or National High School MAL, Spring '10, in Washington, DC)

www.ncusar.org/modelarableague

National
Council
on US-
Arab
Relations



1. Mitigating the social and economic effects of substance abuse on family structures, public order, and national development

What's the Issue?

Substance abuse is becoming a leading cause for the deaths of countless individuals in the Arab world. Experts report that substance abuse has been linked to an increase in HIV/AIDS (380,000 people living with HIV/AIDS; 40,000 newly infected in 2007 according to the [2008 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic](#)), that women are using drugs more often than men, and that the age of drug users has been decreasing. In addition, many drug users have not been seeking treatment to become less dependent on the substances due to lack of education and access to such programs.

Relevance to the Arab World

Great importance is put on family structure in the Arab world and this important structure is often undermined when family members resort to drug use. One such cause for this drug use is high unemployment – in some cases, it has been shown that poor economic infrastructure contributes to a more desirable environment for illegal drug trades to take place rather than for money to be made by legal means. In addition, failure to integrate workers who have moved from more rural environments to city environments can cause citizens to resort to drug use since they are unable to identify with their newer, more unfamiliar forms of government and society.

Questions to Consider -- *from your nation's unique perspective*

- What are the leading causes for substance abuse in the country that I represent?
- What programs have already been put into place to stop substance abuse – what has worked and what has not?
- What should the role(s) of NGOs in this debate?
- How large of a role does religion play in this debate?
- How does substance abuse affect the lives of the citizens of the country that I represent?
- How is national development suffering as a result of substance abuse in the country that I represent?
- Is drug trafficking an issue that should be addressed?

Resources to Review

Drug Use Problems in the Middle East (A Presentation created by experts from around the world)
<http://www.uclaisap.org/slides/methamphetamine/Drug%20Abuse%20Problems%20in%20the%20Middle%20East.ppt>

Article: Addressing HIV and drug use in the Middle East and North Africa
http://www.unaids.org/en/KnowledgeCentre/Resources/FeatureStories/archive/2006/20061103_IDU_ME_NA_en.asp

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC): Drug Prevention in the Middle East
<http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/preventing-drug-abuse-in-the-middle-east.html>

2. Addressing challenges facing political activists and civil society organizations in the Arab world, including the status of minorities

What's the Issue?

As more and more Arab nations embrace a spirit of free speech, both spoken and written, many activists and organizations are speaking out against their respective governments. Governments, in turn, are reacting to these individuals and groups with unprecedented force; incarceration is not uncommon when an individual or group speaks out against a government official, and reports about these incarcerations have caught the attention of many human rights organizations worldwide.

The effects of these incarcerations have therefore hindered journalists' ability to, in their estimation, accurately report certain issues prevalent in Arab nations. In addition, minority groups often rely on the press and human rights organizations to make their concerns known to other nations and organizations in an effort to bring resolution to problems that are occurring. Arab governments, meanwhile, contend that the reporting of these issues presents a threat to the security and welfare of the citizens in the respective nations.

With regard to minorities, language barriers often hamper communication. With minority groups speaking different languages than official languages, minorities are often not heard.

What is a Civil Society Organization and a Political Activist?

The London School of Economics Centre for Civil Society defines Civil Society Organizations as:

Civil society refers to the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values... Civil societies are often populated by organisations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organisations, community groups, women's organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, trades unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy group.

Political activists are similar to Civil Society Organizations in that they look to make a statement not as an organization but as a group of individuals.

Questions to Consider -- from your nation's unique perspective

- How do officials treat political activists and civil service organizations if they speak out against the government?
- Does a complaint against the government present a threat to the security and welfare of the nation and its citizens?
- Is it possible for activists to coexist in society without threatening the stability of that society?
- How do the Internet and new forms of media and rapid information distribution (as used in blogs, forums and RSS feeds) impact the discussion when addressing challenges facing activists?
- What role do foreign media and international NGOs play in this debate?
- How of groups whose native language differs from official languages still be heard by governments?

Resources to Review

Definition for Civil Society Organizations (in full)

http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/what_is_civil_society.htm

Reporters Without Borders – An organization which reports information about journalists worldwide

<http://www.rsf.org>

3. Guaranteeing access to basic and continuing education for all people, especially girls, women, and other vulnerable populations

What's the Issue?

The World Bank reported in early 2009 that “the quality of education in the Arab world is falling behind other regions and needs urgent reform if it is to tackle unemployment”. This serious lack of access to quality education has been a root cause of many challenges facing the Arab world, including lack of infrastructure in some areas, increasing unemployment and a continuing disparity between the lower and upper classes. In addition, fewer educational opportunities for women have created a significant disparity between males and females in society, with illiteracy rates of females double of those when compared with their male counterparts in many countries in the Arab world. With regard to young people, parents are often encouraging young children to go to work instead of school due to economic conditions at home.

What is being done now?

Many NGOs, including UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) are working within Arab nations to provide educational opportunities for all, however economic infrastructure present in Arab nations has hampered the progress of these organizations.

Questions to Consider -- from your nation's unique perspective

- How does a lack of access to education for women and children effect the economic situation in my country?
- Should women and children receive access to education?
- How should the committee take religion into account when addressing this topic?
- Is education a luxury or a right for citizens of my country?
- What role(s) do NGOs play in providing access to education for all?
- How can Arab nations work together to improve the quality of education in our respective nations?
- What can be done to reduce the cost of education for citizens of my country?
- Even if education is available to the public, are jobs available for these educated citizens? If not, how can jobs be created?

Resources To Review

BBC: “Arab education falling behind”

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7227610.stm>

Empowering Women, Developing Society: Female Education in the Middle East and North Africa

<http://www.prb.org/Publications/PolicyBriefs/EmpoweringWomenDevelopingSocietyFemaleEducationintheMiddleEastandNorthAfrica.aspx>

United Nations Activities and Publications for the Advancement of Arab Women

<http://www.escwa.un.org/divisions/databases/aaw/pub.asp>

Minorities in the Middle East: A listing of websites and articles to serve as a starting-point for researching minority groups

<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/mideast/cuvlm/minorities.html>