

# Investing in the Future

## ARAB MEDIA COMMUNITY FOR CHANGE



Center for Defending  
Freedom of Journalists



DUTCH SUPPORT FOR MEDIA IN DEVELOPMENT



## INTRODUCTION

The recent *Arab Human Development Reports (AHDR)* give a dramatic picture of the lack of development in the field of democracy and civil society participation in the Arab world. In most Arab countries freedom of

expression, freedom of the press and freedom of association are curtailed by restrictive laws, and by social and political taboos. Access to information for media and citizens is often very restricted.

## DEVELOPING A KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

The challenge of developing a knowledge society in the Arab countries is of paramount importance. Mass media plays an essential role in the distribution of knowledge and information. The obstacles to the development of free and independent media are mentioned in the *Arab Human Development Reports*. The three major deficits of the Arab media are access, content, reception. Development is hindered by political restrictions. There is also an acute deficit of freedom and good governance. Most Arab countries lack an independent judiciary. Besides that civil society organizations and the media continue to suffer from restrictions.

## PROFESSIONAL SOLUTION

Press and media can build bridges of communication in societies. Compared to other regions, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) enjoy the least freedom of the press. Professionalism is an effective weapon against censorship and restrictions. Political complications and lack of freedom of expression call for the need of increasing legal awareness of journalists and knowledge of the international standards on human rights.

## GOAL

The program *Investing in the Future* focuses on strengthening grassroots media NGO's in the MENA-region in three major fields; defending freedom of the press, raising professional standards and increasing legal awareness.

## RESEARCH

An extensive research by an Egyptian academic team was conducted with in-depth interviews with 50 media professionals and key informants in Bahrain, Yemen, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Morocco. Participating NGO's in these six countries provided the raw material including a survey and hundreds of journalists responded to a detailed questionnaire.







## CONCERNS AND NEEDS

The concerns and needs of these media professionals are laid down in the report *Investing in the Future* and form the guidelines for our program. They prove that media professionals and lawyers in the Middle East and North Africa have an urgent demand for expanding professional formation. This is not limited to the professional field of acquiring advanced skills. It also stretches into the field of intellectual formation, including

critical thinking based on the principles of freedom and democracy and legal formation on media legislation, freedom of expression and legal protection. Besides that training of local trainers in Journalism Skills and Media and Law and English languages courses are requested.

## MEDIA COMMUNITY FOR CHANGE

At a regional media experts conference in Amman in 2005 about *Investing in the Future* it was agreed upon that the professional qualifications of Arab media professionals should be improved, as well as their legal awareness and training skills. Ultimate goal is to create a regional Media Community for Change. This will be a group of motivated radio, television, print and Internet journalists and media lawyers trained through a 5-year program of professional training, capacity building and other professional activities. This Media Community for Change will train colleagues and give good journalism and freedom of the press in the Arab world a boost.

## INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

Our program *Investing in the Future* contains components that start parallel as well as in sequence. Important activities are a 2-year comprehensive training program in which between 900 and 1000 media professionals and 24 legal experts will receive mid-career training. This program is open to radio, television, print and Internet journalists and media lawyers. If there is a need, additional training for female media professionals will be provided. Another objective is to initiate a regional debate on excellence in journalism through professional workshops and publications. Also, the capacity of local organizations to defend freedom of the press will be raised.



## TRAINING (IN SIX COUNTRIES)

- Journalistic Skills for journalists (120)
- Journalistic Knowledge, including legal awareness for journalists (120)
- Basic Training of Trainers for lawyers (24) and journalists (120)
- Legal Knowledge Media Cases for lawyers (24)
- Advanced Training of Trainers for lawyers (6) and journalists (30)
- Foreign language
- Topics of Interest for journalists (1200)
- Workshops on issues concerning Media, Journalistic Profession and Media and Law

## MAJOR ACTIVITIES

- Capacity building for local organisations and NGO's with specialization in financial and administrative management to improve organisational skills and administrative proficiency and efficiency
- A monthly e-mail newsletter informs media professionals on the latest developments in the program and on media issues in the Middle East and North Africa
- Educational material and techniques will be development to support the trainings and the local trainers in future
- A website will be developed to support our program *Investing in the Future*. It will also serve as a forum for exchange and discussion on professional themes on media, law and freedom of the press in the region
- Evaluation in the six countries of the programme and extra needs

International and Arab academics and experts will be involved to guarantee the high standards of the program. The program staff will draw up the curriculum. Experts from the participating Arab and international NGO's, and independent academics will also be consulted.



## WHO ARE WE?

The program will be facilitated by the Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists (CDFJ) in Jordan in cooperation with media NGO's in Bahrain, Lebanon, Jordan, Yemen, Egypt and Morocco, and by Free Voice in the Netherlands.

## DAY-TO-DAY ADMINISTRATION

During the four months kick-off period the program will be headquartered at the CDFJ offices in Amman. A program coordinator shall be recruited and co-ordinate the daily running of the program under responsibility of CDFJ.

A steering committee has day-to-day responsibility for the program and will consist of one representative from CDFJ, one from Free Voice and one from United Group in Egypt. The steering committee is responsible for selecting the program coordinator, a legal expert, a journalism-training expert, and support staff. It will also supervise the curriculum.



### CONSULTING COMMITTEE

A consulting committee will advise the steering committee and guarantee the quality and consistency of the programme. The consulting shall meet on a regular base and will consist of a representative from CDFJ, a representative from Free Voice, an academic consultant, one representative from the Arab partner NGO's and one representative from the international partner NGO's, which may include OSI, IMS, ICFJ, Article 19. Also three independent experts will be included.



## TEN FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ'S)

1. There are many initiatives on media projects in the Middle East and North Africa. What makes this program unique?  
Unlike many other strategies to promote independent journalism and to improve professional skills this strategy is not donor-driven. In 2005 CDFJ and Free Voice commissioned a substantial research into the situation of mid-career journalistic training and law & media in six Arab countries: Bahrain, Yemen, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Morocco. Participating local NGO's provided analyses of training needs based on a survey. The report *Investing in the Future* is the foundation of our program.
2. What are the direct effects of the program?  
Journalists who receive training share their acquired knowledge with colleagues without conscious efforts, but also intentionally due to our strong Training of Trainers component. The Training of Trainers program will generate an Arab Media Community for Change. This will be a group of motivated radio, television, print and Internet journalists and media lawyers who will train colleagues and give good journalism and freedom of the press in the Arab world a boost.
3. How wide is the regional outreach of a participating journalist?  
A journalist working for a weekly newspaper with a circulation of 20,000 copies reaches usually many more than 20,000 people. Most newspapers are read by several people and articles are often read on the radio or republished on the Internet. Together the trained radio, television, Internet and print journalists will reach an audience of millions in Morocco, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Bahrain and Yemen.



4. Do Arab journalists feel the need for these trainings?

Press syndicates and associations generally don't do enough to raise the professional qualifications of their members. *Investing in the Future* proved that media professionals and lawyers see the need for training in journalistic and media skills. Also there is a lack on English and foreign language skills, which prevents them to keep abreast of new developments in their profession. They also suffer from a lack of legal networks to defend them and to confront dictatorial regimes restricting freedom of expression. There is also an urgent need for training on international human rights, particularly the right to freedom of expression.



5. Why does the program focus on these countries?

A Media Community for Change is feasible in Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Morocco and Yemen because these countries have a certain degree of freedom of the press and they have active media NGO's.

6. How does the program stimulate development of democracy and civil society participation in the Arab world?

Good, professional journalism is indispensable for building an open and democratic society. The training program focuses on media, law and freedom of the press.

7. Why no training is provided on new media and Internet developments?

The program foresees the participation of print, radio, television and Internet journalists. But in the first phase priority is given to developing general professional journalistic skills and issues, like interview techniques, finding journalistic topics, writing news stories and journalistic ethics. These basic journalistic skills are also indispensable for Internet journalism.

8. What are the costs per trainee?

A training of four days in the region for one person costs € 1775, including international travel and lodging.

9. Who guarantees that a trained journalist will not switch career and accepts a better-paid job at a company?

Nobody is able to guarantee this. The ultimate goal is that journalists raise their professional skills and legal awareness. When a trained journalist switches his career the benefit is that his knowledge will be spread among other fields of the society.

10. A trained journalist risks getting into conflict with his government. What is the use supporting this?

Change doesn't come about without resistance and conflicts. The goal is to provide media professionals with all necessary prerequisites to make balanced decisions in their work. If a journalist gets into conflict, trained lawyers should provide him with judicial assistance. For example, all Jordanian media organizations refused to support Jihad Momani, editor-in-chief of weekly *Shihan*, as he got fired for re-publishing the cartoons of the prophet Muhammad. CDFJ provided Momani with legal aid. Our partners and media professionals confirm the urgent need to improve the legal networks protecting journalists.



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## MORE INFORMATION



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