

Peace Building Through Education: A Central Concern

Fadi Yarak*

In the early part of the twenty-first century, new aspirations have emerged for sustainable peace, dignity and freedom in different societies and parts of the world, including Lebanon. Many questions have been raised about the fundamental role that education plays in achieving these aspirations, and in confronting the flood of violence, extremism, and cultural and religious intolerance sweeping over our societies, placing entire generations at risk of alienation. There are serious calls for rethinking the role of education, and the ensuing debate about the kind of education we need. What type of citizens do we want to shape? What are the skills that we want to reinforce? What are the best pedagogical approaches to adopt?

In light of this reality, education is undergoing major transformations globally. At the Ministry of Education, we are keeping up with these transformations by starting a discussion around a renewed educational vision for equitable and effective human development, through a curriculum development workshop that promotes respect for diversity, by combating discrimination and cultural domination, and by establishing education policies that contribute to improving teaching and learning outcomes. In addition, we are doing this by implementing programs and activities that promote a sense of responsibility toward others and develop twenty-first-century skills, with peacebuilding, dialogue, critical thinking, conflict resolution and communication skills being at their forefront. We believe in the importance of education as a key factor for sustainable peace, where all educational institutions play a role in instilling the values of coexistence and building a dutiful national identity, rather than simply passing on information and knowledge. Education has never been as important as it is today, as it plays the crucial role of advancing knowledge and behaviors required to foster a sense of citizenship, of reinforcing individual responsibility in achieving peace and fighting against hatred and violence. Education can help voices of moderation, solidarity, reason and respect prevail, as peace requires, more than ever before, dialogue between communities and greater intercultural engagement.

Henceforth, we need a new education for these new times and conditions. We need, more than before, an education that contributes to preparing our children and our youth to live in a diverse society in which others are respected regardless of their differences. Certainly, we are not aiming to cover one subject, but rather work on integrating and teaching this new education through direct and indirect activities, covering all subjects and educational activities inside and outside the school. Books alone are not sufficient to teach and spread human values; it is important to complement their work by providing leadership and practical application. Here, I applaud the role of the highly qualified teachers at the Ministry of Education, and highlight the efforts they have invested in promoting the system of values and noble principles.

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education is expending all its efforts to build a culture of peace and non-violence in its institutions, taking inspiration from our cultural heritage rich in diversity, from our common ancestral human values rooted in our culture, and from the teachings of both the Islamic and Christian religions, and building on the laws and international conventions that Lebanon is committed to implementing.

* Director General of Education at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education

Teachers Syndicate: A Story of Legal Empowerment

Lawyer Ziyad Baroud*

The Teachers Syndicate is not new on the scene in terms of issues, unionizing and fighting for its rights. Its leading role in the Union Coordination Committee and in other causes relating to rights is well established. I would like to shed light on two aspects that I have had to deal with by virtue of my position as lawyer and legal counsel to the syndicate since 1996: The fate of the salary scale and the mechanisms of legal empowerment within the framework of claiming the rights of teachers, given the impact of these two issues on social security.

1 - The salary scale:

It is known that the passing of the scale under Law 46/2017 was the result of a legal struggle led by the syndicate with the Union Coordination Committee over the years. The parliamentary elections of May 2018 may have been an incentive for certain political forces to see the scale through on the eve of the ballot. The law was enacted and became effective in accordance with legislative procedures. However, the issuing of the law was not necessarily accompanied by its implementation. Some school administrations objected and only applied it in part, while others refused to apply it altogether, and others still applied it literally and in full. In the context of a severe economic and social crisis, teachers were framed in confrontation with the administrations of some schools. The parents objected to the increase in tuition fees. Everyone unfortunately clashed and an official response was missing, leaving the partners in the educational process floundering in implementing a law enacted by legislators who failed to follow up on the process. This has led to, among many things, other problems before the Compensation Fund for private school teaching staff, which has slowed down the settling of end-of-service compensations and pensions. All this has threatened social security as it affects large segments of society, particularly teachers and parents, depriving the former of rights owed to them as recognized by the law and imposing on the latter additional burdens. Not to mention that some schools (especially in rural areas) already suffer from accumulated deficit.

In the absence of a decision by competent officials, there is growing concern today regarding potential re-examination of the rights recognized by the law already in effect—rights granted by some schools and obtained by those eligible. Legislative stability is a cornerstone of social stability. There should be no improvisation in legislation, especially since there are already available solutions that may allow for a sustainable response, provided that the State assumes some of its responsibility with regard to basic education that has been compulsory since 2011.

2 - Legal empowerment:

Meanwhile, the Teachers Syndicate continues to seek the empowerment of teachers, as it has done since the mid-1990s. In addition to the work of its executive board and its branches in the regions, the syndicate offers free legal advice on a weekly basis. It also conducts correspondence with the relevant

official bodies and takes legal proceedings in matters of principle. It is perhaps the only syndicate of its size in Lebanon that offers this type of services to its members free of charge. Experience has shown that supporting teachers through legal empowerment contributes significantly to securing their rights and preventing loss of such rights due to ignorance of the law. In the same context, the office of the legal counselor of the syndicate issued booklets and books on:

- «The Rights of Teachers in Questions and Answers», a booklet that includes a simplification of knowledge about rights.

- «The Rights of Teachers in Legislation», which is a collection and compilation of various laws and regulations relating to teaching staff in private schools. It has been issued in two editions to date.

- «Dismissal from Service and the Rights of Teachers», a book on the various aspects of dismissal from service with jurisprudence references and case law. It has been issued in three editions to date.

- A number of articles and comments on judicial rulings concerning teachers, especially in the journal «Al Adl» (Justice) issued by the Beirut Bar Association.

In all of the above, the syndicate plays a very important role in raising awareness and assisting teachers, who form an educated group in society so that they are able to communicate with the school administrations in a way that lives up to the educational space they share with them.

In the end, despite the noise, confrontations, strikes and anger rounds that it brings at times, it is clear that the syndical experience also raises the level of debate and reinforcement of rights, pushing towards dialogue with partners in the educational process: from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and the Parliamentary Education Committee to unions of educational institutions, school administrations and parent committees.

This is the way toward achieving social security. Not only because of the number of stakeholders in the educational issue, but especially because of what this issue means for the future of Lebanon. Here people are edified and here every one learns the meaning of rights and the meaning of respecting them. And from here will emerge the future leader of the country. Here real development begins and is carried on sustainably...

*Appeals lawyer, Lecturer at the University of Saint Joseph (USJ), Former Minister of Interior and Legal Counselor to the Teachers Syndicate of Lebanon