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Ramallah Office

PRESS RELEASE
2017/13
Jericho, 21 September 2017

UNESCO organizes open dialogue between security forces and media on freedom of expression and safety of journalists in Palestine



A 3-day open dialogue brought together police and security forces and journalists in Jericho, Palestine from 19 to 21 September to foster understanding of the mutually beneficial roles of security and freedom of expression.

Police and security forces learned about the important role of freedom of expression in safeguarding democracy, while journalists were sensitized to the functions of security forces. The event provided an opportunity for discussion and exchange, and encouraged common understanding of each other's role in safeguarding democracy, safety and human rights.

As Lodovico Folin Calabi, UNESCO Representative to Palestine, explained, "this activity will help develop the capacity of members of the Palestinian police and security forces to uphold the right to freedom of expression and the safety of journalists through a deepened understanding of the role and function of media professionals in democratic societies". Ann-Sofie Nilsson, Consul General of Sweden, viewed the activity as an important arena to discuss the rights of journalists and others and to see how security forces and media professionals can work together to jointly protect these rights.

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Haytham Arar, Head of Democratic and Human Rights at the Ministry of Interior, which co-hosted the event, informed participants that the Prime Minister had welcomed this UNESCO initiative, stating that it would contribute to the development of institutional performance within the security forces.

The workshop emphasized the common goal of strengthening the rule of law, combatting impunity and establishing safe conditions for all, while looking at the specific risks faced by female journalists. Through practical examples and cases, participants deepened their understanding of freedom of expression as human right, developed strategies for peaceable communication and reviewed safety issues and procedures. The training also involved strengthening the capacities of law enforcement actors in communication techniques and relations with the press.

George Kanawati, Director of Radio Bethlehem 2000, underlined that such initiatives were of great value for improving relations between security personnel and journalists and enabling a better understanding of their respective roles. “Both have one mandate, working for the benefit of Palestine and Palestinian citizens”, he underlined.

Abdul Wadud Najjar, Public Relations Officer in the Civil Defense, shared this view. "Such meetings facilitate communication between the two parties and create a positive atmosphere, breaking the barriers which usually journalists feel towards security forces.”

This training is part of a wider initiative by UNESCO to uphold its mandate to foster freedom of expression through the training of security forces, within the framework of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity endorsed by the UN Chief Executives Board in 2012. Similar training activities have already been successfully conducted in more than 10 countries, among them Iraq, Libya, and Tunesia.

This project has received support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

For more information on UNESCO’s activities in Palestine, please visit www.unesco.org/ramallah and visit us on : Unesco Ramallah Office

For more information on this event, please contact: Majd Beltaji, Public Information Officer of the UNESCO Ramallah Office, at m.beltaji@unesco.org