

Students Debate Ethical Approaches to Journalism

Ramallah, 16th March 2013

Around 100 students from Media and Journalism programs from universities in the West Bank had the opportunity to discuss and debate the importance of applying ethical approaches to their work, this week. Led by Hossam Ezzedine, a respected Journalist and the Head of the Ethics Committee at the Palestinian Journalists Union, the talks took place at Bir Zeir, Hebron and Al Najah Universities. The talks form part of an ongoing project around Ethical Journalism, implemented by Civic Forum Institute (CFI) with Electoral Reform International Services (ERIS), and funded by the British Consulate in Jerusalem.

Mr Ezzedine said, 'Being a Journalist involves a lot of responsibility. As Journalists, we provide people with information, keep them in touch with what is happening throughout the country and the world, and help to shape people's opinions and ideas. Therefore it is crucial that we treat this responsibility with respect, and that we ensure that the work we do is of the highest possible standard, following rules and applying the important principles of fairness, balance and transparency in our day to day work'.

Topics discussed and issues raised by the students included the ethics of images, particularly around the publication of pictures of dead bodies, and the importance of checking facts and information, not just seeking the 'showy' headline. Students at Al-Najah University discussed the challenges journalists face from editors, owners of media houses, and public and official bodies. Dr. Ayman Al-Nimer, Head of Media Department at Al Najah University welcomed the discussion, saying, 'these talks are so important for directing the students along the right track'. He urged CFI to intensify these talks and meetings emphasizing the readiness and willingness of the university to host such activities. Ms. Abla Rweis, from the Media Center highlighted the center's interest in communicating with organizations working in the field of media and social awareness in order to integrate such meetings with the specialized topics taught at the university.

Najeh Abu Shamsiyeh, representing CFI, thanked the Media Center and the students, urging them to sign the Code of Conduct for elections' coverage in Palestine, directly and online.

The students were enthusiastic about the talks, and the chance to discuss ethical issues. Most agreed that a Code of Conduct for Journalists was important in Palestine, and almost every student signed the Code of Conduct around Election Reporting. This Code, developed by representatives of the Palestinian Media in November 2012, lays out key principles for the reporting of elections, many of which are applicable to all journalistic practice.

Mohammed Abu Diab, Director of CFI said, 'students are the journalists of the future, and engaging them with these important principles is crucial for their training and development, to ensure that the media in Palestine goes from strength to strength. CFI are delighted to be working on this project, with journalists from throughout the country'.

The activities of the project will continue with training for young journalists focusing on implementing ethical approaches in their day-to-day work, and an Ethical Media Forum with senior media figures to discuss the position and future development of the Palestinian Media.