



Press release

Beirut, 23 March 2016.

The Agence universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF) and its “École Doctorale de Droit du Moyen-Orient” (EDDMO), in partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Regional Bureau for Education in the Arab States and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), organized their first joint Moot Court competition in Lebanon, from March 21 to 23, 2016 at UNESCO Office in Bir Hassan, Beirut.

During this Moot Court Competition, that was concluded today, 28 students from 7 universities (from Lebanon and Egypt) debated, in front of a dedicated and highly specialized jury, the laws and rights of refugees and the different legal and procedural aspects related to this theme.

Through this event, a first of its kind in Lebanon, UNESCO, AUF and NRC aim to highlight and further explore the very sensitive issue of refugee rights and related legislations in the Arab world, specifically in Lebanon and Egypt, as well as achieve a number of outputs, including:

- Deeper involvement of students in carrying a focused research in the form of doctorate or master's thesis on the existing legal framework (rights and laws) related to refugees on the international level, as well as the national level in host countries;
- Enriching the academic debate about specific legal complications faced by refugees due to legislative gaps and shortages, and other legal challenges;
- Suggesting a set of recommendations on how to improve/fully implement legislations and rights related to refugees;
- Raising awareness and provoking proactive involvement on issues related to refugee laws and education among PhD and Master students in the legal domain.

“We are proud to take part in this very important event that deals with a very sensitive topic for Lebanon, Egypt, and the Arab world in general”, noted Dr. Hegazi Idriss during his opening statement, representing UNESCO Beirut Office Director Dr. Hamed Al-Hammami. Dr. Hegazi also praised the very successful partnership with both AUF and NRC, hoping for this seminar to constitute a true milestone in raising awareness about the laws and rights of refugees in the region.

Also speaking during the opening, Julia Herzog-Schmidt, Information, Counselling, and Legal Assistance Specialist at NRC, highlighted the significance of this event for the Council's main mandate, namely the provision of comprehensive legal support to refugees. “We are particularly happy to assist in organizing this first Moot Court that deals with refugees' rights in the region”, stated Mrs. Schmidt, who also praised the constructive partnership with UNESCO and AUF.

“The event is doubly important for us. On one hand, this is the first Moot Court competition on refugee law organized in the region and, secondly, it is an especially sensitive theme at the national, regional and international levels”, stated Mr. Hervé Sabourin, Director of the Middle East Office of the AUF.

During the first two days, 12 Doctorate and 16 Master's students competed in simulated court proceedings, which involve drafting memorials or memoranda and participating in oral arguments. Winners were selected by a jury composed of 12 judges and 12 practitioners/academics.

The third day, however, was an awareness seminar day, open to the public and partners. Two discussion sessions were held covering key topics: 1- Obligations of Signatory and non-Signatory States to the Convention on Rights of Refugees; and 2- Conventions and Legal Instruments supporting the Right to Education of Refugees and challenges facing the Lebanese government in promoting this right.

Also in this day, the final debate was held to announce the winner of this competition. Finalists competed in front of a high level jury consisted of key political and legal officials, including Mr. Antoine Sfeir representing Lebanese Minister of Culture HE Raymond Arayji; Professor and former Minister of Social Affairs, Sélim El Sayegh; Senior Legal Advisor of UNHCR, Dominique Tohmeh; as well as representatives of the Ambassadors of Netherlands and Norway.

Due to armed conflicts and political turmoil, Arab countries are facing one of the biggest human tragedies in recent times, with around 5 million refugees fleeing their homes and seeking safety in neighbouring countries. Although refugees' rights are well noted in national contexts and further enforced by international conventions, more should be done to raise awareness around these existing legal tools, support their full implementation, and ultimately guarantee that international human rights standards in this prospect are met

***The Agence universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF)** is an international organisation that brings together francophone or partially francophone universities, colleges, university networks and scientific research centres from across the world. With a network of 821 members in 106 countries, it is one of the most important associations of higher education and research institutions in the world. AUF is also the agency for higher education and research of the Francophonie Summit.*

*The mission of **UNESCO Office in Beirut** is to contribute to sustainable human development in a culture of peace underpinned by tolerance, democracy and human rights through programmes and projects in UNESCO's fields of competence: Education, Sciences, Culture and Communication & Information. As a Regional Bureau, UNESCO Beirut Office is a centre of expertise in the field of Education for the Arab world, serving twenty-two Arab countries in the region.*

***The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)** is an independent, international, humanitarian non-governmental organisation which provides assistance, protection and contributes to durable solutions for refugees and internally displaced people worldwide. NRC has been working in Lebanon since 2006, and has grown significantly since the start of the Syrian crisis. Through its core activities NRC provides humanitarian assistance and protection to refugees from Syria, Lebanese host communities, as well as to the Palestinian refugees already living in the country.*

***For more information or interview requests
Please contact:***

AUF Communication Officer Syma Mati

syma.mati@auf.org or 01 420 270

UNESCO Public Information and Media Officer Jad Merhi

j.merhi@unesco.org or 76 867 462

NRC Media and Communication Officer Rayane Abou Jaoude

rayane.abou.jaoude@nrc.no or 76 777 509