



**STAND UP WITH  
THE TEACHER  
CAMPAIGN**

**AN EXPERIENCE  
OF  
COLLECTIVE VOICE**  
IN IRBID - JORDAN



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THE TEACHER  
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International  
Labour  
Organization



Stand up with the teacher campaign:  
An experience of collective voice  
Irbid, Jordan  
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Launched in Irbid, Jordan, Stand Up with the Teacher is a campaign designed to build the power of female teachers working at private schools in order to enable them to demand their labour rights. The National Committee for Pay Equity (NCPE) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) jointly created and supported this campaign. The ILO hired the Ahel organization to train and coach teachers based on a community-organizing methodology developed by Marshall Ganz of the Harvard Kennedy School. After explaining the context and reasons for the continuing violation of female teachers' rights in the private education sector in Jordan, this case study describes almost two years of collective action. It reports on achievements and challenges and makes recommendations for researchers and policy-makers interested in education reform and workers' rights in Jordan. This study was written while the campaign was still ongoing, so it tells an unfinished story.

By Nisreen Haj Ahmad, Ahel <sup>1</sup>

## Background

With the exception of internationally-accredited private schools, it is common practice for private schools in Jordan to pay female teachers less than the national minimum wage, set at 190 Jordanian dinars (JOD) per month.<sup>2</sup> Teachers are often not compensated for overtime or tasks beyond their job description such as accompanying pupils on the bus or extracurricular activities. They are often obliged to resign in May only to be hired again in September, allowing the employer to avoid paying salaries over the summer months. This interrupts social security payments, reducing access to social security benefits, including maternity leave, injury and death benefits. Furthermore, teachers are often deprived of annual leave and may be coerced to resign or lose their contracts if they are pregnant.

In Jordan, any university graduate can become a teacher. Up until 2015, graduates of two-year community college courses could also become teachers. Teaching is, therefore, not only a profession for those holding a degree or certification in education. Thus the supply of teachers always exceeds the demand and every year thousands of graduates enter the education job market. Although Jordan's conservative society discourages women from leaving home they are encouraged to become teachers. A woman's salary is considered to complement that of her husband or father, so that women are more likely than men to accept a low salary. A female teacher is potentially considered a good wife as her working hours allow her to attend to the family, including during the summer vacation. Also, they work in a segregated community with limited encounter with non-family men. For many women, teaching is their way out of being stuck at home and gives them meaning.

The majority of Jordanian private schools are companies registered with the Ministry of Trade and Industry with a limited number registered as charitable societies. Schools must be licensed and approved by the Ministry of Education (MOE). The Ministry of Labour (MOL) monitors their implementation of the labour law, while the Social Security Corporation (SSC) ensures that employers register all staff in the social security system. The MOL, MOE and SSC all have inspection departments and inspectors with the legal authority to apply punitive measures if violations are detected. Depending on the nature of the violation, a teacher may revert to the relevant organization or go to court. In theory, the judicial system gives priority to labour cases. In practice, however, labour disputes take two to three years to resolve. For pay-related disputes where the worker continues employment, the teacher can go to the Wage Authority Court, based at the MOL. This court is obliged to resolve cases within six months. In practice, however, this court is only operational in Amman for those working there. No similar courts have been set up in other governorates.

There are three "unions" relevant to teachers' rights: the Teachers' Syndicate, the Owners of Private School Association, and the Union of Private School Workers. These three parties came together during the year 2013–14 to negotiate and improve the status of teachers, especially in private schools.

The outcome was a Collective Agreement and a Unified Contract<sup>3</sup> to be signed between teachers and private schools commencing in the academic year 2015–16. The Unified Contract obliges the employer to state the employee’s salary and job title. It also obliges the employer to pay the teacher their salary during the summer break if they are hired for two consecutive academic years in the same school. It further prohibits the employer from employing teachers as anything other than what is described under their job title, and prescribes a 3 per cent annual pay rise. The Unified Contract must be signed in four copies: for the teacher, the employer, the Teachers’ Syndicate and the MOE.

To respond to legislative, institutional, and structural gaps with regard to pay equity, a national committee was established in 2011. The Jordanian NCPE is comprised of 23 national institutions and organizations, including several women’s rights organizations and media. It is supported by the ILO and jointly chaired by the MOL and the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW). It meets twice per year to discuss strategy and its annual plan.

## **Campaign story**

In order to fill the knowledge gap on gender wage discrimination in Jordan the ILO commissioned two studies, published in 2013. These reviewed the labour law vis-à-vis gender equality issues and quantitatively analysed the gender wage gap in the private education sector in Jordan<sup>4</sup>. Launched by the NCPE, the studies generated a national dialogue on gender-based discrimination in the workplace. The NCPE continued to work at a policy level, advocating for changes to the legislation and greater monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. By 2015, it had become clear to the NCPE that more action was needed at the grassroots level in order to engage directly with private school teachers, while supporting them in their demands for change. Eman Al Okour (from the MOL and on behalf of the NCPE) together with Reem Aslan (ILO consultant) approached Ahel, an organization that follows the community organizing methodology by Marshall Ganz of the Harvard Kennedy School, and sought their involvement in enabling collective grassroots action. The ILO contracted Ahel to train and coach the teachers’ campaigners in Irbid. The governorate of Irbid was selected due to its very high number of female teachers and the availability of data on wage levels. Given the lack of collectively organized female leaders in Irbid’s private schools, the first step for Ahel was to identify and recruit female private school teachers who were facing violations of their right to join the leadership team of this community campaign.

With the help of Reem Aslan, Abeer Al-Akhras from the Teachers Syndicate, and Eman Al Okour, the Ahel team (Mais Irqsusi, Reem Manna and Nisreen Haj Ahmad) searched for teachers willing to lead. This was easier said than done. An initial attempt in December 2014 through the Teachers Syndicate in Irbid failed. The syndicate invited teachers and principals to a meeting, without explaining its exact objective. No teachers offered to lead the campaign. A second attempt was made through two members of the Amman Teachers Syndicate who work in a department in the syndicate that follows up on issues related

to private schools. However, with no signs of progress in recruiting teachers, the organizing meeting was cancelled. Ahel then contacted individual teachers recommended by syndicate members or by Eman Al Okour. One teacher, Eman Irshaid, demonstrated commitment and leadership potential, especially following a success story of a struggle against injustice at a private school, but she now works in a public school and is studying for a master's degree. Ahel also met with Farida Khreis who, although retired, had wide access to teachers and is well-networked due to her activity in Irbid's syndicate. Ahel requested Eman and Farida to recruit more teachers to an orientation session set for 28 February 2015. Some 28 teachers attended the session, together with representatives from the ILO, MOE and SSC. Participants shared stories of injustice at their schools and were invited to join the leadership team at the end of the meeting. Six teachers joined the team (Basima Abdul Jabar, Farida Khreiss, Raeda Al Abed, Nareeman Shawaheen, Inam Odeh and Lina Rifai). Lawyer Mohamad Matalqa, a dedicated inspector at the MOL, was also present at the meeting, signalling that close cooperation with the MOL could be expected.

Over those three months, Ahel learned that teachers were reluctant to join a collective campaign for their rights for three reasons: fear of losing their job, lack of faith in potential change, and a diminished faith in the MOL and MOE's ability to enforce the law and protect them. Nevertheless, the campaign was launched. On 4 April 2015, Mais Irsusi of Ahel ran a two-day formation workshop (referred to as SSS: Story, Strategy and Structure) with the six teachers who had volunteered to lead. Mohamad Matalqa, Reem Aslan and Eman Al Okour also attended the workshop. Together, the core leadership team developed a collective narrative, chose a specific objective, and put forward a tentative strategy. The campaign objective was to ensure that private schools sign the Unified Contract with their teachers for the coming academic year 2015–16 while avoiding ways of circumventing the agreement as had occurred with previous contracts. To achieve this, a three-pronged strategy was proposed: (1) raise teachers' awareness while (2) the MOL runs inspection drives, and (3) incentivize schools to honour workers' rights. For that they wanted to recruit 25 more teachers, organize them into four teams and build power. In this formation workshop, the core team set its norms and met once per week with Farida and Neriman assuming internal management roles. A couple of weeks later the campaign chose the name Stand Up with the Teacher and created a Facebook page<sup>5</sup>. Farida's son designed its logo.

The newly-formed core team ran a three-week drive to research aspects relevant to their objective. They also identified private schools that were especially unfair to female teachers. To recruit more leaders, they ran one-on-one meetings to invite teachers to a two-day community organizing workshop at the end of April 2015. While they hoped for 25 teachers, only six new teachers showed up. During lunch break and on a weekend, several teachers were contacted with news that the principal was concerned that they should not be instigators of disorder. Thus the attempt to recruit more teachers and create teams to run the campaign failed. Finally, four of the six teachers joined the core team: Najah Al Natour, Seham Al Doumi, Amani Rifai and Eman Nazal (a public school teach-

er). Tamer Awawdeh, an inspector at the Irbid MOL, also joined the team.

Their first was an awareness workshop where the discussion on teachers' rights led to a message to the teachers: "Demand the Unified Contract!" With support from the Teachers' Syndicate, MOL, ILO and Ahel, the campaign proceeded by organizing two general awareness sessions. Some 20 teachers attended the first one (9 May 2015). Unfortunately, a smaller number came to the second one (30 May 2015) and tension arose between the syndicate and the campaign. The campaign continued awareness-raising tactics. They posted announcements and images on their Facebook page. They telephoned teachers, encouraged them to sign the Unified Contract and explained its benefits. They realized that copies of the contract were not made available to the schools and school administrators did not know that they were obliged to sign it with the teachers for the next academic year. The campaign then printed and distributed 200 copies of the Unified Contract with the campaign's logo on it, as well as the MOL helpline number. Reem Aslan and Abeer Al Akhras made copies of the Unified Contract available to schools at certain libraries and bookshops. In June 2015, both women convinced the Minister of Education to issue a communiqué to private schools informing them that they were obliged to use the Unified Contract template.

During Ramadan 2015 it was difficult for the campaign to maintain momentum. Some teachers ran one-on-one awareness conversations in their homes and in the mosque during Taraweeh prayer, but these were limited. Primarily, the teachers aimed to increase their followers on Facebook and create their own database of private school teachers. The database they were using was from the Teachers Syndicate. However, it was out of date and did not identify whether teachers and principals worked at private or public schools. The campaign posted a Google form on its Facebook page and broadcast the link through WhatsApp. Slowly but surely, the database grew with teachers' contact details, schools and job titles clearly indicated. Soon, summer was over, and the academic year was nearing and schools started signing contracts with teachers again. The campaign picked up again. It put up ten big street banners in the main streets of Irbid urging teachers to ask for the Unified Contract. In September 2015, Ahel trained the core team on how to run an effective phone-banking event using the database they were building. The campaign reached 300 teachers and ran more than 40 one-on-one meetings. They explained the Unified Contract, its context and benefits. During these calls and meetings, the core team members heard a lot of complaints from the teachers. The campaigners always advised them to go to the MOL or call its helpline and register their complaints. The MOL would then move inspectors to their schools. Soon the campaign teachers realized that the helpline did not take complaints from Jordanians and only received complaints from foreign workers. To inquire or complain, the teacher must attend in person to the Ministry's office before it closes at 3 p.m., which is also when they finish work. The MOL inspection department is closed on weekends.

As the campaign received various stories of injustice, the core team compiled



a list of 20 schools that needed serious monitoring and inspection. Two stories stood out. The teachers of Ikleel Al Jabal School organized themselves to recover their delayed salaries and get paid the minimum salary. The teachers, including Tamador Azayzeh, went to the MOL office in Irbid and filed complaints. Ikleel Al Jabal got more than ten warnings and fines and an ultimatum that if the school did not correct infringements, the establishment would be closed. Nonetheless, the school continued as it was. It ended the contracts of all its teachers and hired a whole new team of teachers in September for 2015/2016. The school re-opened, business as usual, despite the MOL warning. The MOL formed an investigation committee to see how that was allowed but Ahel and the stakeholders (NCPE and the campaign) could not verify the result of the investigation. A similar story happened with Hiba Abu Ghneim at Al Farouk School and those teachers who campaigned lost their jobs without the MOL being able to protect them. Both teachers mentioned here – Tamador and Hiba – later joined the campaign core team.

On 17 September 2015, worried about the capacity of the inspection department at the Ministry, Reem Aslan, Eman Al Okour, Reem Manaa and Nisreen Haj Ahmad met with Hamadah Abu Nijmeh, the Secretary-General of the MOL. They asked him to fix the helpline, launch an inspection drive on 20 schools and fine those schools not using the Unified Contract. The Secretary-General promised to fix the helpline and move the inspection drives. The Ministry later issued a tender for a helpline system and as a temporary measure launched a WhatsApp complaint service, which the teachers found to be not working.

From the beginning, the NCPE coordinator and Reem Aslan of the ILO knew that the three main parties responsible needed to come together for real change to come about. So on 6 October 2015, the NCPE organized a national conference attended by the Minister of Education, the Secretary-General of the MOL and a representative of the SSC to discuss the status of teachers in private schools in Jordan. The conference was attended by Princess Basma and many human rights activists, unions, and women's organisations. The campaign core team members were in the front rows. The teachers shared their stories around the injustices they faced and presented their campaign. The policy-makers discussed two main issues: tighter monitoring of private schools as well as better coordination between the relevant agencies. While the MOE insisted that female teachers do not complain and accepted these injustices, the teachers responded that without tight monitoring and meaningful fines from the Government, they are just sacrificing their jobs. One of the recommendations that came out of the conference was to make the licensing of a private school conditional on its good record of labour rights.

During the conference Nareeman Hawasheen and Inam Odeh – both female teachers and members of the core team – took the microphone and announced that on the morning of that day and before heading to Amman, their employer ended their contracts for participating in the conference without his permission. Additional bogus charges were also made against the women<sup>6</sup>. Both the Minister of Education and the Secretary-General of the MOL strongly urged them



to file official complaints so that their cases could be followed up. The next day both women filed complaints and inspectors from both ministries commenced a process of meetings with the school's principal. The media covered this case, drawing much attention, including from Princess Basma's office. The MOL then issued a warning to the school asking it to rectify the violations. Inam and Na-reeman refused to return to the school fearing retaliation, and decided to take the multi-year route of pursuing redress in the courts. A few weeks after the conference, Lawyer Hala Ahed offered to represent them pro bono and filed the paperwork.

Ahel was set to design and run a reflection session at the end of October. With all the events it became an emergency two-day workshop for the core team to reflect, evaluate and re-strategize with the active participation of the of the MOL inspectors, Eman Al Ekour and Reem Aslan. The core team revised their campaign objective. Most of the teachers had signed Unified Contracts that protected their rights, but the actual honouring of their rights was lagging. Worried that the contracts would be meaningless, the campaign leadership modified their focus to: (1) ensure that the rights expressed in the Unified Contract were actually honoured in at least 30 schools in Irbid; and (2) put in place an attractive plan to incentivize employers to respect teachers' rights. While improving inspection and protecting the teachers was discussed at length, no decisions or changes were made.

Three to four days after that workshop, the core team sent a formal letter to the Secretary-General of the MOL with a list of specific recommendations to improve inspections. The campaign also submitted a letter to the head of inspection at the ministry, Abdallah Al Jbour, and proceeded to coordinate with him. On 21 December 2015, the campaign met with Abdallah Al Jbour and discussed a more diligent method of inspection. He subsequently issued a directive to his staff to move three inspection drives on 30 specific schools in Irbid. However, implementation was not quick. The first drive happened in February 2016 by the MOL's Employment Department – not by the Inspection Department – and no schools were put under pressure.

With the decision to focus on awareness-raising activities, the first action was to educate teachers on employers' ways of avoiding their responsibilities and how to counter them. Hiba Abu Ghneim, a core team teacher, interviewed 52 teachers and identified 11 employers' tricks. She then met lawyer Muad Al Khasawneh, who provided legal advice on how to confront each of the tricks. On 15 January 2016, her paper was published on the campaign Facebook page and then in Al Ghad newspaper and other online media. Her paper was well read.

Meanwhile, the campaigning teachers were becoming reference points for other teachers. They needed to improve their legal understanding to respond to questions. So Ahel invited lawyer Hala Ahed to design and deliver a four-day legal education course for the core campaign team members. This course helped teachers to understand their rights based on a careful study of the articles of the labour law. It also pushed them to apply that knowledge to real-life

scenarios and understand the judicial process. Throughout the course, the teachers developed and recorded recommendations for policy-makers to strengthen protection of their rights. A couple of weeks after the sessions ended (end of February 2016), the teachers took oral and written examinations to solidify their learning. The teachers who passed received certificates, which they enjoyed receiving. This gave them additional credentials and respect. Eman Nazzal was the teacher with the highest score. She became an “Ambassador of Rights” and began to respond to legal inquiries addressed to the campaign. In April 2016, Eman Nazzal presented draft recommendations to the Director-General of the MOL at the award ceremony where certificates were distributed.

Seeing how valuable that legal course was, Ahel worked with Hala Ahed to produce the first legal guide for teachers, explaining the law and the judicial system with specific teacher-related scenarios and infringements. Some 500 copies were printed and the teachers reached out to other teachers and distributed them. Furthermore, Ahel and Hala Ahed produced six one-minute videos, each presenting an infringement of a teacher’s right and the legal answer to it. The campaign published these videos via its Facebook page in the following months. To date, there have been more than 8,000 views of the videos and more than 20,000 page visits to the online version of the guide on Facebook and the Labour Watch webpage.<sup>7</sup> In the same period, Arij for investigative journalism published a report titled Contracts of Submission, which included a video documenting how private schools deprive Jordanian teachers of their rights, including summer pay and related social security issues. Arij’s report<sup>8</sup> created further interest in the cause and in the campaign.

The core team decided to run another legal workshop to reach more teachers and they took responsibility for organizing at the end of April. They set an agenda and coordinated with Ahel and Hala Ahed. Two teachers helped run the workshop. Three teachers helped deliver three of the modules. Some 26 teachers joined the workshop on the first day. However, six of the 26 teachers (one of them a core team member – Seham Al Doumi) were absent because the owner of their school obliged them come to work, even though it was the weekend. It was a passive “punishment” because they attended the workshop. Three weeks later, and after seeing the teachers defy his vindictive measures and demand their rights for summer pay and other matters, the owner informed the six teachers that their contracts would not be renewed for the next academic year. The teachers complained to the inspection department of the MOL, who followed up with the employer, but he refused to reverse his decision.

As this was happening, the core team was finalizing their draft Recommendations Paper, drawing on teachers’ remarks in both legal workshops and their own experiences over the previous months. Their Recommendations Paper included suggestions on how to better protect their rights among the different ministries, the SSC, and the Teachers Syndicate. The recommendations addressed issues such as minimum wage, vacations, inspections, helplines, salary interruptions and more. Reem Aslan and Eman Al Okour arranged a series of meetings with officials so that the campaign could present their

recommendations. On 2 and 8 May 2016, members of the core team, together with Reem Aslan, Eman Al Okour and Reem Manna, met with the MOL, head of the SSC, the MOE's department of private schools, the Union of Workers in Private Schools, and a few parliamentarians. In the meeting with MOL, the campaign raised the need for tighter and more resourceful inspections, as well as improved help. With the SSC, the campaign discussed how some employers do not pay their subscription regularly or accurately and the repercussions of that on their social security benefits. They especially highlighted how many employers force female teachers to resign in May of every school year if they wanted their jobs back in September so as to avoid paying salaries over the summer months. The Director of the SSC, H.E. Nadia Al Rawabdeh, later instructed her staff to pay more attention to private schools and demanded an inspection on a list of twenty schools provided by the campaign. This led to having a liaison officer at the SSC with whom the campaign coordinated.

The campaign still wanted two more MOL inspection drives as per the agreement with Abdallah Al Jbour so as to pressure schools before the school year ended. But the Irbid inspectors cited limited resources since they run inspections for all business sectors in Irbid. In response, Ahel (from the ILO grant) provided a car and a driver to take the inspectors on these drives in May 2016. By the end of that month, the three inspection drives were complete. However, not a single school was significantly fined nor threatened with closure.

At the heart of all the work was the core team, which needed to be strong. The campaign continued to build its members' capacity and grow its online community. Ahel and Lara Ayoub delivered two digital capacity training sessions for the campaign. The first addressed basic skills, such as using email and Google Drive, and the second was an intermediate social media skills session on Facebook and Twitter. The campaign wanted to increase its Facebook audience, although by now they had exceeded 7,000 followers (with no budget for promotion). The audience grew consistently with awareness-raising posts and with advocate Mohamad Matalqa (joined later by teacher Eman Nazzal) diligently answering all inquiries on Facebook. Audience numbers hiked with stories of teachers who won their rights in the courts even if it took them three years. Knowing that online mobilizing is not enough, Ahel delivered a two-day training workshop on community organizing using the same methodology the campaign had been following all along.

In June 2016, Ahel ran an evaluation workshop for the core team, reviewing lessons learned and planning for the next phase. This marked a milestone, after which Ahel decreased its coaching of the core team, which started running its campaign more independently only drawing on Ahel when needed.

June and July brought two pieces of good news to the campaign. In mid-June, the MOL announced that it was testing a new helpline service for Jordanian workers with a revised process for higher efficiency. It published the phone numbers and the campaign tested them. Furthermore, on 11 July 2016, the head of the SSC issued a decision that the SSC will not accept interruptions in

the subscription of any teacher during the summer months if they return to work at the same school in September.<sup>9</sup> H.E. Nadia Al Rawabdeh coordinated the decision with the Minister of Education who, on the same day, issued a communiqué to private schools that a 12-month teaching contract is obligatory, otherwise the license of the school will be at risk. Ahel and the ILO had long organized a dinner celebration to take place on 11 July 2016 with the families of the core team members. The event was to celebrate the teachers' dedication and to acknowledge their families who "allowed" and encouraged them to participate. With the decisions out, the dinner also celebrated this achievement towards greater protection of teachers' rights.

The core team, pleased with the decision, wanted to ensure its implementation. On 25 July 2016, Reem Aslan organized a series of follow-up advocacy meetings for the core team with the SSC, the MOE and the JNCW, both to thank them and to follow up on implementation. During this period, changes in the leadership of the MOL worried all key actors. A month down the road, the campaign was pleased to see that the new MOL leadership was supportive to these collective efforts.

Over the year 2016, relations between inspection officers and the campaign ebbed and flowed. While the inspectors became more accessible to the teachers and provided them with great support and advice, the teachers were often disappointed by the lack of rigour, capacity or impact of the inspectors' work. Without incentives and with a high workload, inspectors lacked the necessary resources and motivation to conduct rigorous inspections. Furthermore, many inspectors were redeployed – without training – from positions at other ministries or the Parliament. On 4–5 August 2016, the ILO ran training for inspectors of the MOL and the SSC (with a limited presence of the MOE). The training focused on how to run inspections at schools, drawing on stories from teachers who attended the workshop. A second part of the training was conducted over another two days (18–19 December, 2016), and included inspectors from both the MOL and SSC from Irbid, Ajloun, Ramtha and Jerash.

More than a year and a half ago, and in their first formation workshop, the core team agreed on a three-pronged strategy: to raise awareness among teachers while the MOL ran inspection drives, and to incentivize schools to honour workers' rights. With the first two strategies being pursued, the third got a little delayed. The intention was for the MOL to select some potential schools and invite them into a process of upgrading and protecting workers' rights. In return they would receive a certain privilege – perhaps be listed on a golden list, get some tax/fee break, or have their licenses facilitated. The underlying assumption of this strategy was that some schools may have been violating teachers' rights because they lacked awareness, and, if given guidance and incentives they would improve their conduct.

In July 2016, the ILO commissioned two independent consultants, Jansette Qandour and Raghda Qandour, to assess ten schools' Human Resource policies from the angle of gender awareness and fair remuneration. After submitting

their findings, the NCPE drew on lawyer Nour Imam's assistance to develop several policy papers: (1) a proposal for incentives attached to certain conditions that the schools would need to meet, as well as privileges they would enjoy if they qualified; (2) recommendations for changes to the Collective Agreement and Unified Contract for private school teachers; and (3) a draft memorandum of understanding to organize the collaboration between the MOL, MOE and SSC. In consultation with others, Nour Imam prepared and presented the drafts in November 2016. This work was then thoroughly consulted among all involved parties, including the teachers of the campaign. It is hoped that the Collective Agreement and Unified Contract will be renegotiated between the representatives of the workers and the employers and that working conditions of private schools' teachers are thus improved.

These efforts have encouraged the teachers to continue. They have since organized a third legal education session for more teachers and 19 new teachers attended. They undertook a two-day course with Ahmad Awad to enhance their negotiation skills and a one-day workshop with Ahel on agenda-setting and facilitation of meetings. Throughout this period, the teachers leading the campaign were concerned for its sustainability and asked Ahel to present them with options for becoming a legal body or institution. On 17 December 2016, Ahel presented them with an analysis of various options, including a not-for-profit organization or an informal group to be hosted under a sister organization. The teachers came to this meeting feeling a sense of justice because just two days earlier the SCC had imposed a considerable fine for evading social security payments on the school that had fired Inam and Nariman more than a year ago.

Finally, throughout the process, various key players talked about expanding and replicating their experience beyond Irbid to other governorates in Jordan. In August 2016, the ILO contracted Ahel to recruit and train private school teachers in two other governorates in the first months of 2017.

## **Outcome and challenges**

The campaign, with the support of many stakeholders, achieved results on three levels:

(1) Policy. The campaign played a crucial role in the decisions of the SSC and the MOE in July 2015 to prevent employers from avoiding salaries over the summer months to private school teachers. The inspectors of the MOL, MOE and SSC are now a little more equipped at handling complaints, run more frequent inspection drives on private schools and the ministry's helpline has been revamped. Furthermore, imposing a considerable fine on the school for social security evasion delivered a strong message that the authorities are serious about implementing their policies.

(2) Awareness. More than 54 teachers acquired deep knowledge of their rights, how to access to the judicial system, and how to negotiate. More than 300 teachers were personally contacted by the campaign and were made aware of



the Unified Contract and their rights. More than 300 copies of the legal guide-book were handed to female teachers. More than 7,000 people continue to be informed via the Facebook page. The campaign created a database of teachers from all over Jordan.

(3) Leadership. Finally, perhaps most important was building the teachers' leadership and power. Over time the teachers started managing their meetings, organizing their events, speaking up for their rights at school, and presenting their cause to decision-makers and the media. Their leadership abilities grew incrementally with coaching and skills training delivered by Ahel, Reem Aslan, Eman Al Okour, and others. Over time, their families and communities treated them as leaders, which reaffirmed their leadership roles.

The campaign faced multiple challenges. Primarily, it was not able to provide protection for the teachers who demanded their rights from the employers' retaliation or from losing their source of income. When the campaign approached new teachers to join, they often cited a fear of losing income or a lack of conviction that change could occur. Therefore, the campaign was unable to expand and recruit more teachers to join its ranks. Although attempts continued, the campaign was limited to the small number of teachers mobilized and it was not able to create more teams to such a scale that would give it serious leverage. Another challenge was the lack leadership capacity of the teachers recruited. Ahel never intended to coach closely for over a year or to take such a strong role in coordinating the campaign at certain points. When it cut back its coaching, Ahel was concerned that momentum would drastically decrease. The same applied to the degree of engagement from other stakeholders, including Reem Aslan and Eman Al Okour.

## **What's next?**

The Stand Up with the Teacher campaign will continue. Over the coming months, we will see how the MOE, MOL and SSC improve enforcement and evolve the kind of inter-institutional cooperation that is needed to pressure employers and deal with their continuous attempts to bypass teachers' rights. We will also observe whether the campaign core team develops ways to recruit more female teachers and increase their membership, especially given teachers' fears of the consequences. Growing a strong base is needed to build a collective voice and ensure that 2017 summer salaries will be paid.

Furthermore, two important processes have developed over the past couple of months, the fruits of which will grow in 2017. The first is developing and introducing an attractive programme to incentivize schools to respect teachers' rights. The second is finding teachers to lead similar collective action in other cities in Jordan.

## Findings and lessons learned

(1) Building power at the school level. Organizing a large number of teachers to demand their rights is difficult. They often fear losing their jobs or being labelled. They also do not believe that there is enough protection against being dismissed, whether from the Government or from the Teachers' Syndicate. Stories of teachers being dismissed en masse (or contracts not renewed) are often shared among teachers and inhibit collective action. This is the primary challenge that stands in the way of teachers organizing and claiming their rights.

(2) A culture that prevents winning action. The dominant social mind-set around working women – especially teachers – who demand their rights impedes progress. Society views them as “troublemakers” or “manly”. When they face challenges at work, their families either advise them to endure, to leave the school or stay at home. This mind-set is held by women themselves, so they tend to discourage and label those who demand their rights. A lack of trust develops and gossip ensues. To enable meaningful promising action, work on changing this culture should be seen as fundamental.

(3) Certified to teach. Every university graduate regardless of their field of study is a potential teacher. No teacher training, examination or certification is required. Setting criteria for who can teach would increase the quality of education and help address the issue of over-supply. Currently, supply exceeds demand so much that female teachers are easily replaceable. If teaching was a certified profession, then the supply would drop and employers would be less likely to dismiss teachers that demanded their rights.

(4) Government monitoring and enforcement. Monitoring private schools falls under the jurisdiction of three different institutions – the MOL, MOE and SSC. The monitoring and enforcement of these institutions is neither tight nor coordinated. Without addressing this, collectively organizing teachers will continue to mean that they will lose their jobs whenever they demand their rights, thereby raising anxieties when taking action. Greater enforcement is possible through a series of parallel coordinated interventions. The same violations tend to occur every year and are predictable. Strengthening investigation and data collection by inspection officers could be done if they were better trained, incentivized and monitored. However, the leaders of these agencies need to consider this a priority. Worries about increased unemployment if workers' rights are enforced is a short-sighted way of understanding social security. Teachers whose rights are violated cannot raise generations of independent thinkers or agents of change. As great as their dedication to their mission may be, they cannot be models of free thought and human dignity. They will most likely raise students who are rote learners and followers, and might eventually pose a threat to national security.

(5) A map of influential actors. Organizing teachers to demand their rights both builds their power and represents a strategic investment. However, there are three other actors who are crucial to introducing change. The first is the royal



family – especially Her Majesty Queen Rania, who for years has led education reforms and investments in teachers. The second comprises the international agencies and donors who have invested millions of dollars in education. The third is the media, not only because of its power in shaping public opinion but because – for a campaign like this one – it can reach the two other actors mentioned here. Developing a strategy for how this campaign can engage these actors is essential to success.

Finally, many Jordanians (including this author) believe that improving the status of education and teacher is the most important cause in Jordan. It represents an investment in forthcoming generations, one that will contribute to creating youth equipped for life, developing them into true citizens, and forming open-minded communities. Furthermore, women comprise a large proportion of teachers and teaching represents a high percentage of women participating in the labour market generally. Therefore, improving the situation for teachers will improve the situation for many women. But that is not all. Growing the leadership of teachers – not through training but through experiential learning – will advance women’s rights at a deep level. For these reasons, this campaign, among similar initiatives, should be seen as a national priority.

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<sup>1</sup> This case study was written by Nisreen Haj Ahmad and edited by David Cann, Emanuela Pozzan, Reem Aslan, Kaja Joval and Carla Calvo.

<sup>2</sup> The minimum wage in Jordan is JOD 190 which corresponds approximately to US\$ 270 per month. It is expected that the minimum wage will be increased by JOD 30 in March 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Some translate the term to “Collective Contract”. We chose to use “Unified Contract” for this case study.

<sup>4</sup> ILO, 2013. Towards pay equity – A legal review of Jordanian national legislation. Available at: [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms\\_215608.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_215608.pdf)

ILO, 2013. A study on the gender pay gap in the private education sector in Jordan. Available at: [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms\\_230673.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_230673.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/qoum.moualem/>.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/women-private-education-paid-40-less-men---study>.

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.labor-watch.net/uploads/ar\\_labor-watch.net\\_636040211520170131.pdf](http://www.labor-watch.net/uploads/ar_labor-watch.net_636040211520170131.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> <http://arij.net/report/معلومات-بعقود-إذعان/>.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/decision-ensure-private-school-teachers'-job-security-hailed-milestone>.