

Human rights in Saudi curriculum: Experts to discuss strategy

Arab News - 05 January, 2008

The National Society for Human Rights (NSHR) has invited representatives of 16 higher educational institutions in the country to a workshop that will discuss steps to include human rights in the curriculum in Riyadh today.

The one-day workshop will emphasize the importance of teaching human rights at schools and colleges and give a clear view of the new academic program.

Dr. Bandar Al-Hajjar, president of the society, stressed the strategic importance of education in promoting a culture of human rights in the country.

"We have underlined the importance of education in promoting human rights ever since the society's formation," Al-Hajjar said.

During the past years, the organization was busy preparing its infrastructure, such as a specialized library in Riyadh and a comprehensive data center.

"This infrastructure is essential to create a conducive atmosphere for teaching human rights," Al-Hajjar told Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper.

The participants in today's workshop include representatives from 14 universities, Naif Arab University for Security Sciences and King Khaled Military Academy.

Teaching human rights at educational institutions in the Kingdom is one of the society's strategies. The society has proposed to introduce the subject either to all university students irrespective of their specializations or to students of law, medicine and mass communication.

"The third option is to introduce as a general subject to all students and allow students in certain streams to study it in-depth," one official said. "We can also merge human rights with other existing subjects," he added.

Top officials from the universities of King Saud, King Abdul Aziz, Imam Muhammad ibn Saud, King Fahd, Jizan, Taiba, Madinah, Al-Jouf, King Khaled, Qassim, Taif, Hail, Um Al-Qura and King Faisal are expected to participate in the workshop.

"The work will discuss strategies and methods to introduce the subject in Saudi universities as well as secondary schools as part of the society's efforts to create greater human rights awareness in the Saudi public," one NSHR official said.

The NSHR has taken a series of measures to protect human rights in the country during the past years. It published a report on human rights situation in the country last May.

A number of foreign ambassadors visited the society after the report's publication in order to praise the work and the level of freedom enjoyed by the organization in taking up human rights issues. International rights bodies also praised the report.

"Unfortunately we have not received any positive or negative comments from government agencies in the Kingdom," Al-Hajjar said.

He added that the report had strengthened the Kingdom's position as a member of the Geneva-based International Human Rights Committee.

Set up in 2004, the NSHR is the Kingdom's first human rights watchdog and it works independently of the government-funded Human Rights Commission, which was established following a Cabinet decision in October 2005.