

Jordanian Teachers back to school

By Gerd Kieffer-Døssing

12 March 2021



For the last four years Danmission has worked with a project in Jordan training teachers. Through workshops, the teachers received tools and knowledge on how to teach about tolerance, respect, and acceptance of the other in their classrooms, promoting coexistence across boundaries.

Schools are a place for intellectual learning, but it is also a learning institution that provides the students a toolset for good social behavior. This is also true in Jordan, where prejudice across religious, ethnic, and national divisions threaten cohesion, and the country's teachers often lack the tools to influence the behavior.

"Years spent in schools are very formative, where teachers have a great influence on their students' lives. It is therefore crucial that they do not contribute to more conflict and distrust, but instead promote the development of mutual respect, teaching the children to see the value in each other despite differences" says Thea Hochar, project manager at Danmission's regional office in Lebanon.

Under the project name 'Teachers of Tomorrow' (ToT), Danmission has implemented a series of workshops, where schoolteachers become students, and are equipped with tools and knowledge to teach their students values such as diversity and tolerance, to be able to answer questions about "the others" and to promote coexistence. In short, they are trained into creating dialogue instead of conflict.

Acceptance of others is the most important thing

33-year-old Noor El Deen Al-Zoubi has been an imam for 14 years. The last five years he has taught 11–15-year-old children Islamic religion at a private school, but since joining the ToT workshop in 2020, something has changed. Or rather: Everything has changed.

"I am no longer the same. Before, my thinking was very conservative; it is not anymore. I have changed a lot, and my whole view on the world has changed. My life as a human being has improved" he says over a Zoom connection from Jordan.

It was through the ToT course that Imam Noor met Christians for the first time in his life, and discovered how much talking and exchanging with them was an enriching experience:

"The most important thing I have learned from ToT is to accept other people – regardless of their religion, age, color, nationality, and not to see "the other" as an enemy, just because he is different".

Today Imam Noor is bringing these notions into the classroom, by including other cultures and religions in his lectures, and teaching his students about tolerance while giving them a positive notion of diversity.

"I did not include that dimension in my teachings before," says Noor El Deen Al-Zoubi. "I now have tools helping me communicate about these things and explain to my students that they should not be afraid to engage with someone who is different from himself".

Pass it on

The ToT project is running for the fourth year. Each round consists of four phases, where the teachings become more in-depth and comprehensive. Out of the original 46 participants, only the seven most motivated are selected to continue to the fourth phase (a four-day intensive workshop).

Built into the project is also a continuation of knowledge, as TOT participants will be training their fellow teachers and colleagues in the same tools acquired during the course. It is also expected that former participants share their experience and how they are using the tools in practice, to the new participants.

For Noor El Deen Al-Zoubi, this principle of "passing it on" is an essential aspect of the training.

"When you are a new student, it is very valuable to hear other people's experiences - how they have used the tools and what it has meant for them to participate in ToT," he says, emphasizing that he would be very happy to be able to contribute to the next training courses and participate in the project in the future:

"I'm so happy. I've been to many other courses, but this is the first time I have really been able to feel a change in myself as a human being".

Noor El Deen Al-Zoubi is not the only one benefiting from the great change, but his loved ones and his students are also being affected. As an imam he has opportunity to influence a broader group. He chose to talk about diversity during his first sermon in the mosque, right after attending ToT workshop, and the response was overwhelmingly positive. "More than 1000 people listen every time I preach, so my training has an effect there too" he concludes.

The ToT project is developed by Danmission in close collaboration with their partner organisation in Jordan, The Royal Institute for Inter-faith Studies (RIIFS), who also are responsible for its implementation in Jordan. The project is supported by the Danish-Arab Partnership Programme.