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HIGHER EDUCATION IN SYRIA: PROTECTING ACADEMIA AMID CIVIL WAR

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. WINTHROP: Good morning, everybody. Thank you for braving the rain and coming out. I'm Rebecca Winthrop. I'm a senior scholar here and director of the Center for Universal Education here at Brookings. It's a real pleasure to be able to welcome a great group of people talking about higher education in Syria, and particularly the little coverage issue around protecting academia during times of armed conflict and civil war.

We are having this discussion right at a time when the world is talking a lot about Syria and talking a lot about educating Syrian refugees. I think everybody here probably is very aware that the world if facing a refugee crisis not only in Syria, but across Africa and many other places. More refugees than, certainly, World War II times.

Yesterday there was an announcement by the UN special envoy for global education, Gordon Brown that announced that the UN is going to start a refugee education fund focused on Syria refuges, but not just. Certainly, there is a number of refugees in Africa and elsewhere who need education also. That's highly focused on children. Then soon, starting the end of the week and next week there is the World's Humanitarian Summit. Looking at, especially, Syria, the Syrian crisis.

So we are here today to talk about higher education, academics, academia, scholars who are threatened, and the implications that has, and how we can think about higher education as a piece of the education puzzle that we need to worry about when we're talking about refugee education.

I'm very pleased to welcome four great panelists, Allan Goodman, president and CEO of the Institute of International Education, will kick us off. I'll come down from the podium, welcome Allan. He'll kick us off on the topic. He'll give an overview. This is an area that IAE has been working on for many, many years. Then we'll welcome the rest of our panelists up.

I'm very happy to welcome Mohammad Alahmad who's a visiting lecturer at the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies from Georgetown University. Mohammad comes to us, he's a poet and an academic, a Syrian academic who teaches Arab taud, Arab literature in Syria, and has fled the region, and is here now at Georgetown with very generous hosts. We're very happy to have you, Mohammad.

We are also very happy to welcome Rochelle Davis, an associate professor and academic director in Arab Studies at Georgetown who is also the host for Mohammad. Also, Jennifer

Windsor who's the chief executive officer, CEO, of Woman for Woman International. A really good civil society organization working in the region and around the world on a number of topics including these.

I'm not going to go through in great detail their bios. You have them in your packets. So, with that, Allan, why don't you get us started?

MR. GOODMAN: Good morning and congratulations to Brookings on turning 100. We don't feel 100 every day, but it's quite a centenary to mark. Brookings is the kind of institution that is known for not only what it has done, but what it is doing. I know we'll do great things in a second century.

I'm also delighted that one of our institution trustees is here, Mabo Mahmood [phonetic], headquartered in Singapore, originally from Pakistan, and has created a global knowledge platform to bring secondary education to very difficult places, especially in his home country of Pakistan. So, Mabo, if you just wave maybe people will connect with you at the coffee afterwards. But thank you for being here.

The Institution of International Education rescued its first scholar in 1920. Though, unfortunately, we have been at this business for a very long time. As far as I can tell from the archives, to date, we've probably rescued 20,000 scholars. In 1920 it was the Bolshevik Revolution. Russians fleeing the crossfire of that revolution into Europe and having no place to go. Soon after it was the Spanish Civil War. Then the Nazis. Then the Soviets. Of course, today, it's everything you read in the headlines, especially Syria and Iraq.

In the past three years we've had nearly 1,500 requests for help. That's just in the past three years. We've made 250 grants, so far, to scholars from those troubled areas. When I do the numbers, and mention numbers like this, 20,000, 1,500, 110 different countries have scholars that apply to us. Most academic audiences say, we had no idea. It is the one line of work that I wish the Institute didn't have to do. All of us wish we didn't have to do Syria because the scope of the Syria academic higher-ed crisis is larger than anything we've faced at the Institute. It's larger than higher-ed has ever had to deal with before.

It's more complex than ever before because there's Syrians inside Syria. There's Syrians displaced inside Syria. There's Syrians at camps. There's Syrians around camps. There are Syrians in places that don't have camps. But nobody has credentials. Nobody has documentation. People had to

flee, and yet, they were in the middle of their higher education.

The academics, often, were the last to flee which makes rescuing them especially hard. They don't leave because they have students whose thesis their supervising. If you're a medical professor and targeting by the terrorists it's not so much that you're threatened. It's that if you leave the clinic for cardiology or gynecology or ophthalmology the clinic closes, and thousands of people that depended on your clinical practice and your training of students to work in the clinical practice are also harmed.

So we like to say, we don't like to say, but the fact is that academics and scholars that we rescue sometimes are the canary in the coalmine. When scholars are threatened you know there is a deeper problem. But they also don't leave the coalmine until it's very, very far into a crisis. So extracting them, dealing with the trauma that they've had to leave behind students, patients, whole universities has made this very difficult.

As you'll hear from Professor Davis, rescuing a single scholar really does take a village because you're dealing with a legacy, a history, a whole family. That's where universities are really, unusually, able to do this.

Why are scholars threatened? All of my training as a social scientist led me to the wrong conclusion. When we got into this, I got into this in a permanent way with our rescue fund, I think pretty much all of us thought its repressive governments and failed states. In fact, it could be your gender. It could be your discipline. It could be the fact that terrorist, if they can kill you or intimidate you, they have had a powerful effect on a whole community. Or if you just simply kill a medical professor you deny healthcare to thousands of people, as I mentioned, dependent on their clinic.

So the sources of threats are many. They're complex. They really don't allow for easy explanation by social scientists. I'd say every week at the Scholar Rescue Fund we're learning of a new variant of a threat, a new dimension of a threat, or a new threat itself.

Finally, to conclude, what do rescue scholars want? They want to go home. This is not a program to resettle in Florida. Nobody comes to us saying, I'm here. I want asylum. People want haven. They want to be able to do their research or their teaching in some safety. But as soon as it's safe they want to go back because they've left a whole national academy or they need to rebuild a national

academy.

So our needs are really twofold. One, more institutions for haven, and the opportunity that we all wish for so that at the end of the day the scholars we rescue go back and rebuild the Syria, rebuild the Iraq, rebuild the countries where they've had to leave. We very much appreciate the opportunity to lead this panel off, and I know you have a terrific panel ahead of you. So, Rebecca, thank you very much.

MS. WINTHROP: Thank you, so much, Allen, for talking about, sort of, what academics around the world face, and what IIE does. I'd like to turn to you next, Mohammad. Mohammad, whose English, as far as I can tell is excellent, has said he's still learning, and he is going to speak in Arabic. He will have Rochelle translate that which he doesn't feel comfortable saying in English.

So, Mohammad, you are a living example of a scholar that has been rescued. You've arrived recently, a year ago? More or less? Nine months ago, not even a year ago here. So why don't you tell us a little bit, you know, what is was like being an academic in Syria? What's going on there? And then about your own experience?

MR. ALAHMAD: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I'm sorry that I can't speak in English, but I'm learning. I'd like to thank the Brookings Institute for inviting me to this, and for their interest and concern about higher education in Syria. I'd like to thank IIE Scholar Rescue Fund and Georgetown University for all of their efforts in bringing me here and hosting me.

My story is a part of the Syrian peoples' story. We lived in a country that was relatively secure, but under the, sort of, total dictatorial regime of the Assad Regime. In 2011, millions of Syrians went into the street calling for democracy, freedom, and the end of the oppressive regime. But the regime responded back with violence. Using all types of weapons, planes, tanks, and even chemical weapons.

You all know from the media what has happened to Syria in terms of numbers of people killed, and the refugees, and the five million refugees, and the people displace internally, et cetera, so I won't go through that. So I'm going to talk about higher education in Syria during this crisis. So in Syria there were public and private universities and two year institutes of different kinds.

There are six, as you can see on the map, public universities in Syria and that's what I'm

focusing on because they educate the majority of students. In total there are 12 because of different campuses connected to those six different universities. Damascus, Hama, Al-Baath, Aleppo, Al-Furat and Tishreen Universities. They all have the different branches as you can see.

So as you can see, there are over, sort of 600 to 700 students enrolled in these universities in the last five years, as they are on this handout. So you can see where they were in different places, and you can also see that the number has gone up in the last five years. So we know that among university students more than 100,000 of them have left Syria of have been displaced. There are 100,000 inside Syria also displaced not able to get to their universities because they can't get to their universities. Thousands have also been killed or have been detained in the prisons of the regime.

So despite all of these things, we see that the number has increased. The simplest explanation for this is the source, as you can see is from the Ministry of Higher Education in Syria. They do not give us accurate statistics. So the students that have left the country or in prison still remain on the registration rolls and are not moved off of them.

This is the son of our neighbor's who's a third year student in engineering. Last week he died under torture in one of the regime's prisons. There are thousands like him also still in prisons, but they're still registered in these numbers that the Ministry of Higher Education provides. So even all those people outside of Syria are still in these numbers.

All of the universities in Syria have been affected by the crisis. But the one that has been probably most affected are the three branches of Al-Faurat University, the Raqqa Campus, Deir ez-Zor, and Hasakah Campus. He taught at both Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor campuses. So I taught at Deir ez-Zor Campus and I was Associate Dean of Academic Affairs at Raqqa Campus, and then there's also the campus in Hasakah.

So most of the universities in Syria remain under regime control except for the Idlib Campus of Aleppo, two of the Faurat Campuses, and one of the Damascus Campuses. So Raqqa Campus of Al-Faurat University is under the control of ISIS. Idlib is under opposition control. Daraa Campus is under both opposition control and regime control. Hasakah is under both the regime and Kurdish control. This indicates hospital much the universities are also a place where the conflict is present.

I want to talk now about my personal experience at Al-Faurat University. I lived and taught at Raqqa University. It was a city of about 600,000 people. It was an open city reflecting the diversity of Syria and its sort of political views and the diversity of political views as well as the ethno-religious makeup of the entire country. So when the uprising started in Syria the city itself also entered into the fray and thousands went into the streets calling for freedom.

It was the first Syria to go entirely under opposition control in March of 2013. It just continued on normally with the schools and university functioning as it had before. When the opposition took control of it there were also armed units and militarized units there. I was present. We negotiated with them to keep everything open and functioning. We also negotiated with the president of the University and the minister of higher education to keep things going. It continued on. So we continued with the lectures, and assignments, and all of the administrative work, but we couldn't administer the final exams.

In January 2014 ISIS took over Raqqa and kicked out the opposition. So the whole area went under the control of ISIS and we were still able to continue teaching with certain conditions. Among the conditions were everybody had to wear Islamic dress. In the lecture halls there had to be a division between the men and the women. We had to also get rid of some of the subjects that went against the Islamic religion, in their interpretation of what Islamic religion was.

For example, we couldn't teach philosophy, nationalism, or law. We agreed with the students that we would try and implement all of this with the outcome being that we could continue teaching and they could continue to studying. That, to us, is the most important thing. The students agreed. We continued this way for a short period, a couple of months, and then ISIS came and closed down the University and took away the keys from us. That was in October of 2014.

A group of us faculty got together and tried to negotiate with them to allow us to take out the student records and other things that were there because we were pretty certain that the University was going to get bombed and that all of the student records would go up in flames and that all of the efforts of the students would be lost. We wanted to try and preserve that so they could continue their education elsewhere. They refused that entirely, but they did allow us to leave alive.

So with that act, the entire University closed and there were six colleges there and a

number of two year degree granting institutes, and 15,000 students no longer had access to education. About half of the students were female. What happened to all of those students? So they have a couple of options.

Some of them went to areas where the regime controlled universities and transferred and were able to try and continue their education. Others left Syria to take refuge in host countries around there. Some of them left and joined the various armed groups, whether that was the opposition or ISIS. Some of them were killed by the bombings of the regime or were detained by the regime and died in prison. But the ones who have been most hurt by all of this are the female students because they have many fewer options within both the situation we live in and our society.

For example, a young man can leave Syria by himself and flee, but a young woman cannot. She would not be able to leave by herself. So what I take away from this is that thousands of young woman who were university students are left behind living with their families in Syria either under the opposition control or under ISIS control without any access to education or anything else. The situation in Furat University is also similar to what's going on in Aleppo University, particularly in Idlib.

So that's a general picture and now I want to talk about some of the possible solutions to dealing with higher education in Syria. I want to start by expressing my deep appreciation for all of the organizations and institutions that are doing efforts to assist Syrian students and academics. Particularly with IIE and Scholar Rescue Fund and their partners. I have a list, but I don't want to mention them all in the interest of time.

I want to now give my sort of view on some possible options. Despite all of these efforts and projects, there's a huge disparity between the need and what is being offered. We're talking about 200,000 Syrian students who were or are university students and unable to access university education. So those are the students that are outside, and then we've also got students that are inside as well. There's 100,000 students inside Syria that can't get to university campuses, physically can't get there.

One thing I think that would be good to do for all of the various organizations, some of whom are here, would be to have an international conference to talk about higher education in Syria, and to put forward a clear strategy to provide some solution to the crisis of higher education. To get, of course, enough funding to deal with the issue. The best solution that I can think of to come up with this

issue would be to establish a university in Turkey with branches in the other countries around in Iraq, in Lebanon, and in Jordan. There's a lot of positives that could come out of this.

A university system like this could take in 150,000 students. Just like the Damascus University which has 160,000 students in it. All of the Syrian academics that are displaced could also teach in those universities. This university could be taught in Arabic which is what the students all know and they wouldn't have to take a year to learn Turkish or other languages. Such a university would also allow students who had studied for a year, or two, or three in universities in Syria to continue their education and not to have to start over again. It could be an actual mirror of Damascus University and all the things that are taught, and standards, et cetera that are there.

In conclusion, I would like to give a message to you from the Syrian people. That the best solution for higher education and for us, in general, is to end the war and allow us to all go back to our homes, and businesses, and universities. That doesn't seem like it's going to happen soon. But all of us ask that, you know, if we can't stop the war that there at least be a solution to help us continue to be educated and educate ourselves in our universities and secondary schools and primary schools.

At the end of this last year we know that there are 2.5 million children not registered in schools. We know that there are 500,000 university students who are not actually able to access a university education. These numbers are huge and they are getting bigger in a way that is really quite crazy. Not addressing this issue, not only has an effect on us as Syrians or on the region, but also on the whole world. When the door is shut in the faces of students at least some small part of these students will feel hopelessness and will turn to fighting and to extremist forces and learn intolerance and hatred, and potentially go anywhere and blow themselves up. Thank you.

MS. WINTHROP: Thank you so much, Mohammad, for your courage, but also for being willing to share your story and come here and talk to all of us about what's going on and what you've witnesses. You're going to be a tough act to follow for the rest of the panelists. We will have Q&A after we have a discussion with the rest of the panel, so I'm sure lots of people will have questions for you and want to hear from you again.

Rochelle, why don't we turn for you? Thank you for translating. You are an anthropologist, a cultural anthropologist and study this region of the world and focus on, among other

things, displacement and refugees. It'd be interesting to hear from you on that front, but I'm also very curious to hear from you about what does it take to rescue a scholar? What does it take from Georgetown? What did you have to do? What does it mean to be a host for a rescue scholar?

MS. DAVIS: I'm clearly a scholar and not a translator, so sorry. I looked up at some point and looked at you and I forgot what he said, so that's why I had to look at the table. Maybe I'll get better with time. Thank you, all, for having us here.

What does it take? Well, it takes, I think, my colleagues and I sat around and, you know, we all make our livings off of this area, this region of the world. To me, the people in this part of the world have done so much for us that it really is time to give back to them in the ways that we could, and this is a very concrete way that we can do something for, you know, sort of one person and his family.

So I sent a lot of emails to the University, and the president of Georgetown University is very open to this idea. We contacted Scholar Rescue Fund, and I said, we have this really unique program. I'm in the Master's in Arab Studies. Many of our students can take classes in Arabic. So he said we can rescue a scholar who can only function in Arabic who won't be able to teach in English, and so James from Scholar Rescue Fund said, oh, how about this person? So I looked at this CV and I said, sure. I didn't know his name because they black out his name.

I kind of tried to map out what this took and it took two departments. It took my department and the department of Arabic and Islamic Studies. It took the Office of the President to come up with money, Scholar Rescue Fund came up with money. The President's Office came up with money, and then it took our alumni to help him and his family get the necessary visas to actually leave Turkey, which was not an easy task. Once he even got the visas the Turks didn't want to let them leave.

Then when they finally got here it took, kind of, all of our department, our staff, and a lot of us, and my colleagues and the faculty. We got their apartment ready because I thought the last thing he wants to do is arrive and then have to start teaching and then have to, like, figure out how to buy sheets and things. So we kind of -- it was like we were getting ready for a wedding. We got their house ready.

Then we had students who were dying to meet him. Some of them are in the audience here. But, you know, working into the American system is really hard because he had to, like, get a

Social Security number, and he had to do all those sorts of things, and I don't know how to do that. So, yeah, so we just had to kind of keep trying to think of all of the things he had to do and who could help him do that.

I think it was a really, kind of, bringing together for us as a community to think, you know, we are a Jesuit institution, and so there's a really good spirit at Georgetown about sort of service to others. So that was a long answer to that question.

MS. WINTHROP: Is there anything else you want to say or do you want to save it for Q&A? Just reflections on the region in your own research?

MS. DAVIS: Sure. I want to address Dr. Mohammad's proposal for a university in Turkey that is in the various regions as well that has branches. I've done a lot of research on refugees in the region for the last 15 years, looking at Iraqi refugees, and Syria refugees, and Palestinian refugees, and I think that this is an amazing idea. Because, I mean, I have, sort of, 350 interviews, qualitative interviews over the last five years with various refugees. One of the hugest things that we have seen coming out of this is for the first time in recent history, the first time in history maybe ever. We have a generation that is going to be less well-education than their parents.

It's striking because education in the Arab world has been going up since, sort of the 20s, and really steeply since the 50s. Now, all of a sudden, both for Iraq and Syria, we're seeing this drop. If we don't address that and we don't address that in a way that makes sense, and that is financially possible we're missing an opportunity to do something unique and visionary. So by having Syrian universities in these surrounding countries not only can you educate Syrians, but you can educate Syrians who will then go back and educate more Syrians.

I mean, to me it's a cycle, and a good cycle, not a bad cycle. All we ever talk about in Washington are these bad things. But this, to me, is a good cycle. You can education, you can have teacher institutes that they go and work in refugee camps and in elementary schools teaching more Syrian kids. They can be part of the societies that they're in in a really concrete way rather than this kind of fear of young men that is out there, you know, because they are going to be radicalized.

So, I mean, I think it's really -- and it would take a huge amount of money, but we're spending lots of money on other things. It would be a productive use, I think.

MS. WINTHROP: Great. Thanks. Jennifer, let's turn to you. You run a civil society organization. I'm curious what your perspective on what does it mean for civil society, but also society at large when academics are targeted, when they have to flee? I mean, Allan described very poignantly, and Mohammad is a total example of that where the academics don't want to go. They're the last ones, and barely, you know, trying to negotiate keeping all sorts of things open. How do you think about this type of phenomenon?

MR. WINDSOR: In general, I always think it's important, maybe not for this audience, but we tend to think of academics here and higher education as sort of insulated from the larger society. But in most parts of the world there is no insulation. Academics absolutely play a vital role in a number of ways. One is their source of power. This is why, even in the Nazi Germany and during the Communist Era, during any authoritarian regime they want to get control of the universities and they want to control what is being taught there.

It's not a new phenomenon. The reason why is because it really matters. They serve as check on government and accountability. Universities and academics are a natural ally to civil society. I mean, we know about the importance of student politics and student movements. We know that change happens when students get involved. Academics and their professors play that critical role. They also are constantly generating research that really matters to the policy choices that are being made.

In the case of, for instance, women, obviously, we know in a lot of these countries, you know, it is in higher education that we think about policy options and research about what works on various options, for instance, to reduce gender-based violence or to look at health suggestions. I mean, I can keep on going on and on and on.

So, I mean, one question you might ask me in my current role is I work for an organization now that works with the most marginalized women in conflict affected countries. The vast majority of the women that we work with have not completed primary school. But I sort of take the point of sort of looking more broadly at education, and the downstream impact on women and girls, in particular, when higher education is sort of disrupted. That does affect the ability of a country to rebuild after conflict.

It also has a specific impact on women and girls. I really appreciate Dr. Mohammad sort

of calling out that women and girls are in a particularly difficult situation because they may not be able to leave. And if they do leave, so we work in Northern Iraq now with Syrian and displaced Iraqis, when they are displaced they're greatly vulnerable to pressures to marry young, to pressures to, frankly, they are constantly sexually harassed, Syrian refuges. So they really can't even go out of -- we work with them in local communities.

There is this reputation and these women are of, you know, varying educational backgrounds but, you know, my colleague who's here today travelled to Northern Iraqi and she met a woman named Kushra who was a second year physics major. Here is this incredible talent. Her education is disrupted. She very much wants to go back to be education because it's actually a form of protection for her. Otherwise, she would be forced to marry and to have children early on.

But, you know, it goes to the ingenuity and the talent that's in these refuges populations. She actually just self-initiated a design and a community assessment and designed to figure out how to help assess the need of disabled children in refugee camps. She just used her knowledge. You know, they're many, any others, men and women. A former mathematics professor from Syria who is, you know, teaching refugee children in their camps.

So I think that when we look at societies that are pulled apart by conflict, and then also as they try to come together post-conflict, if you don't look at the downstream impact on the kind of disruption on higher education and woman and girls you're really not going to be able to rebuild in the way that you need to. So as, you know, to say that the -- Rochelle said it the best, this I the first time, you know, that a generation will be less educated. What are the implications for that for the societies when we try to rebuild? That's what we have experience on.

So, I mean, I think it's very important to look at this not in a vacuum of just what's happening in higher education, but what is the impact that the disruption in higher education on students on academics is going to have for Syria today, but also Syria tomorrow.

MS. WINTHROP: Thank you very much, Jennifer. We have about half an hour left, and I think we should turn it over to all of you for questions. Raise your hands high. There will be microphones coming around. So there is one right here. Do please state your name and where you're from.

QUESTIONER: Hi. Thank you for an extraordinary session. My name is Mindy Riser.

In an early life I worked for the Council for International Exchange of Scholars which runs the Senior Fullbright Scholars Program. A question to Mohammad. First of all, how accessible is the internet now in Syria? I suspect it varies by different locations. What kind of access could people who can't get to universities anymore have to a variety of online courses?

I realize that's nowhere near equivalent to your wonderful idea about an actual physical university with branches. But it seems to me we need to call upon these kind of resources. I don't know if they're equivalence of some of the moops in Arabic, but I wish you would talk a little bit now about that kind of option for an immediate response to this crisis.

MR. ALAHMAD: Thank you for the question. The internet is pretty good, particularly in the areas under the opposition control and under ISIS control. But in the last few months, ISIS has banned internet access at home in the areas under its control. It monitors the use of the internet via some program. So online education has been one of the things that has been suggested in the situation for Syria, but there are two fundamental problems.

So it's the ability, as you point out, to depend on the internet in a high quality way, and also the students' kind of abilities to figure out how to do online education because they don't have experience with it. The second issue is the countries in the area don't have a lot of experience in online education.

MS. WINTHROP: Thank you. Allan, I actually have a question, but we'll take two at once.

QUESTIONER: Hi, my name is Mace [phonetic]. I work with the Syrian Relief and Development as their advocacy and outreach manager. We are actually focusing now on to have a support for, like higher education inside Syria, including the virtual learning. But we are facing a lot of problems of getting credit, as Mohammad said.

My question now is for Mr. Allan. How can we make an effort to advocate to support for scholars inside Syria to be able for us to have university or a branch of university inside Syria that is accredited. Like, that's what we are facing a problem right now is having American universities or European universities to be able to have a curriculum or certificate after, like, two or three years. It's like a community college here, but like, having a lot of professors. They are still inside Syria. We are

focusing on (inaudible).

It might be accessible. There's, like, internet for doing such things. We still have, like, a lot of students there that they can't go out to the neighboring countries. Also, academic professors they can't go out. So what can be done, actually, to advocate in this regard? Thank you.

MS. WINTHROP: Thanks. We'll take a second question here and we'll answer them as a group.

QUESTIONER: Heather McCloud with NASA Association of International Educators. I work with universities, mostly in North America, to help them bring international issues into classrooms here, as well as to develop international partnerships. And having people, such as yourself, on campus is, I think, extremely valuable to universities. So how can we advocate and get the message out more to universities here in North America that there's this opportunity to make a difference in peoples' lives that will also positively impact their students?

MS. WINTHROP: Great. Thank you. Allan, why don't we turn to you first. I'll save my question, and then Mohammad and Rochelle.

MR. GOODMAN: Both great questions and also great observations. Credentialing and certification is a problem. We need some Arab Ministry of Education because we can't force everyone to learn English, Germany, or Turkish to say we will accept credits from online and other courses taught in Arabic that approximate where you were in education and when it's safe to go back, when universities get reopened that will be able to be counted.

We thought originally we could build universities in a box. You take all the MIT open courseware and some other stuff and instructions and disks, maybe a couple of mobile phones, and people in camps, in tents would, in fact, to go school. That doesn't work because it's not accredited. It's not credentialed. It's not certified. So you need certification. You need the Arab Ministries of Education to step up. You need a no fly zone so that there are places where people can eat, sleep, and go to school in safety.

I don't think we ever thought about no fly zones as a place where you could build a university in exile. I very much think we need universities in exile. But history is not on university and exiled side. Very few universities in exile get built, but I think that may be the solution to the kind of

problem scale that Mohammad is talking about.

MS. DAVIS: I want to address this question about how to get Syrian or other academics into the classroom, as well as the issue of accreditation, and kind of the online education.

There's an organization called Jesuit Commons Higher Education at the Margins, JCHEM, they do a mix of blended education both in classrooms and online. Online is 15 students from all around the world studying together. They are literally all around the world, particularly in Jordan. They used to be in Syria, but then moved to Jordan. They have Syrian and Iraqi and Somalian and Sunnis, and Jordanian students in the classroom.

They really have kind of pioneered this online education, but it does require a physical presence as well, so it can't be just done. They're doing really interesting things.

About how to get, sort of, people in. You know, it takes a lot of work. We spent a lot of hours, one, just trying to get Dr. Mohammad here, but then also, you know, trying to incorporate him into the university. We have a K through 12 outreach program in our center and we send lecturers out into schools. We send students out into schools. We invite teachers to come in. I think that's a really good and safe and known way, you know, for me and Dr. Mohammad to go out into a secondary school is an easy thing that we can do and is possible.

So I think that that's a kind of a unique bridge with universities is to look for their outreach. Most universities have something like that or their communication's department. Then just really kind of say we want someone like this and to facilitate it. But it does, it takes a huge amount of time and that's a problem.

MS. WINTHROP: Jennifer, I'd be curious to hear your perspective, particularly on the last question around advocacy because Women for Women does a lot of advocacy as a powerful advocate for women around the world. Not just on this subject, but on many, many subjects. Do you guys work with higher education institutions here in the U.S. to try to get the message out? Is that a useful ally or are other paths more productive?

MS. WINDSOR: We are not, right now, because most of the focus of our work is on women that have really, as I said, less than primary school education. But drawing of my old hat of being in Georgetown, it's a little bit of a Georgetown mafia here. So I think that, yes, universities, just like any

other institutions respond to appeals and power about their responsibility to give back.

I think that that should be -- I mean, you could just target the -- I don't know how you chose the host universities. I would be interested in saying that, but it would be a great PR opportunity for them. I understand how much work it is, but, as well as a great asset. I could already construct an advocacy campaign to be able to really be able to urge universities to kind of step up to take in scholars and to make that happen. I think that would be a great thing.

Generally, our advocacy efforts are focused on the right of women and girls to be educated, period. In our training programs we train women on very practical skills that they need to rebuild their lives. It's vocational training, but it's also health training. It's a holistic training program for women 18 and above.

I mean, again, I just would say that as a civil society activist and advocate you could easily put together something. But I just think that even this panel is an important start because pinpointing where the needs are, where the people are, and then saying, you know, a couple leading universities, Georgetown is great, can band together and say, okay, we'll each take somebody and here's how we move this forward. I think you could easily do that.

I mean, I was thinking of the APSIA schools which is the American Schools of Public Policy in International Affairs. That's a whole network that could be tapped to be able to say, okay, each of you, you know, should take at least one. I think they would be pleased, in some senses, to say there would be a movement. If you can find the coalitions and then influence the coalitions of different universities that would make a lot of different.

And frankly, I'll make a broader point. It will help to counter the us versus them polarization that's happening in this country, sadly, as well as throughout Europe. Because it's one thing to sort of paint Syrian refugee as a potential terrorist, and it's another thing to look at Dr. Mohammad and listen to him, and understand that, okay, these divisions that are trying to be sewn by politicians that are trying to get their own -- and that are based on fear and lack of knowledge. I mean, it's a perfect way.

Going into earlier, you know, sort of K through 12 is very critical. I mean, I personally think for domestic, U.S. domestic politics it would be very, very important.

MS. WINTHROP: We have a whole bunch of questions. Let's do this side of the room

and we'll do response and then we'll do this side of the room. So one, two, three, I think. Go ahead.

QUESTIONER: My name is Sojen Mohavi and I was a Fullbright Scholar in 2005 thanks to Institute of International education. Later in 2011, Scholar Rescue Fund helped me to come to the U.S. from Russia.

I wanted to follow up Dr. Mohammad's comment on the impact that lack of education would have on getting future terrorists. I want to bring an example from my own experience. I used to occupy position of director of education of Teacher Training Institute in Russia. Once the vice premier minister of our Republic catered us on a very particular issue at the beginning of the teaching you.

The issue was that in our small Republic of less than a million people, 700 children who graduated from the high school didn't enter any university, any other school. They didn't get a job. Seven hundred children, teenagers were just unregistered. That was the only question why the vice prime minister gathered us. The question was, where are these 700 teenagers?

If we don't deal with them today, in five, seven years we get probably not 700 criminals, but at least a huge number. Then it will be polices and law enforcement problems. That is in relatively well-to-do Russia. In Syria, this is a huge problem. So those teenagers who don't get education, and when we talk about education it's probably a misleading word. It's not about just education. It's about creating morally good environment for teenagers to grow up. It's not just about educating them in mathematics or physics.

So my question to Dr. Mohammad is, do you know how the structure of education? Is there any coherent structure to educate refugees, like children in refugee camps so that it would become, as you said, a world problem in several years? Thank you.

MS. WINTHROP: Thank you. We'll take two more on this side.

QUESTIONER: Hi. My name is Jessie Zito. I'm from the National Council of University Research Administrators. We're a university research administration association of about 7,000 members. Our members are people who help researchers put together grant proposals, manage grants, et cetera.

My question is to anyone on the panel. We're interested in sharing our expertise in best practices and putting together grant proposals. Are there organizations that are working on the ground

with Syrian refugees, whether in Lebanon or Turkey that would benefit from this type of expertise? If you could recommend any specific organizations, ideally smaller ones, that would be great. Thank you.

MS. WINTHROP: I think you should waive your hand again and don't move. After the session is done you will have many people come up to you.

QUESTIONER: Hi. My name is Lena Chescovski. I'm with the Global Development Network. We're an organization that networks on building capacity for social science researchers in developing countries. So we very much are believers of having local researchers who can help with policy options like Jennifer was mentioning.

So along the same lines of what Jessie was just saying, we're interested in seeing how do you get to this population that you're talking about? These displaced academics and students? So, for example, we have grant competitions that some of them may be eligible because we work with young scholars right after they get their doctorate, but how do we even find these people? Are they connected somewhere? Is there some way to get access, so that they even know the opportunities that there might be?

I like the university idea. One thing to think about is maybe if a whole university can't be set up right away is to try with a summer school so that there could be at least a start of something that would be a comprehensive way of keeping people up to date on their academics.

MS. WINTHROP: Thank you. So I turn it over to all of you. Mohammad? Rochelle? Allan, why don't you opine here and then we'll go back and forth here, on any one of those questions. We have about the structure of refugee eds, an offer for grant proposal writing assistance, and also, sort of, how to reach that population for, sort of, scholarship grants.

MR. GOODMAN: It's not difficult for people to get in touch. Thank god for the internet mobile phones. Every time we put together a bucket of fund for scholarships we get 6,000 - 7,000 applications within 48 hours. So we are hoping to build this month and next a global clearing house for all of the opportunities that we're hearing about, including, we heard about ASHARA today.

We want to get in one place all of the opportunities that exist for Syrians and other refugees so that they can connect with us, and we can use virtual advising to say, well, you applied for this, but it's really this one that would work better for you so that it's not a dead end. So that this hope,

this advising that goes along with it. But the world needs a global clearing house and we hope that we'll be able to build one and keep it alive as we get ready for a very long future. Because Syrians' problem is not going to go away.

I think higher ed is only learning. We have to be really ready for the long haul to avoid this generation of less well-educated people and foot soldiers for ISIS. That if we don't act is what we're going to get.

MR. ALAHMAD: The first question about children in camps. There's a huge number of children in camps and outside of, particularly in Lebanon. The children in Turkey are in a better situation than those in Lebanon and Jordan. So about 10 to 15 percent of the children in Turkey are in refugee camps and there are programs in the camps both offered by the Turkish authorities as well as the Syrians for those children.

But that's a small number in the face of the huge number of children who are refugees who are more than just over 50 percent of the total number of Syrian refugees. There are thousands of students going to school in the camps. But about 2 million children are without access to education.

Then the question about, sort of, children who graduated from high school, who finished high school but then can't go on and do anything else. That is a situation that we see the numbers increasing every day and needs an immediate solution to it. Turkey, in particular, has really tried to address this issue and has opened up lots of different opportunities for those students. It has agreed to recognize the educational certificates provided by the Syrian interim government to Syrian students.

Then the other question about how to access these kinds of populations. There are lots of ways to get to students. So Fanar Media has a report on some of these various opportunities in both Arabic and English. So on that website there's information about both the things that have happened and then also opportunities that are possible.

MS. WINTHROP: Jennifer, go ahead.

MS. WINDSOR: I just wanted to talk about the language barrier, particularly what we've seen in Syrian refugees going in Norther Iraq which speaks Kurdish, and so a lot of the children and individuals are speaking Arabic, so there is a problem. Then even if you look outside of refugee -- I mean, refugee camps do have some built in amenities.

You know, what we found is that the refugees and displaced people that are most in need are those that are actually in local communities because they don't even have whatever was in the refugee camps. And so thinking about how you reach those populations, there are very, very good local groups that we work with in Norther Iraq and we know of that are working in Jordan and Lebanon and Turkey. I would think that those people know the demographics of who is there. They need, sort of, some connection to a larger network. They wouldn't, necessarily, know how to do it. Those groups, the local groups, that are really working with these populations are a tremendous resource if we can figure out how to tap into them, and get them to share the knowledge about who they're working with the composition and where the needs are.

It should be said that both Jordan and Lebanon have both opened up their public school system to Syrian and Iraqi and other refugee children which is, sort of, an incredible offering that they have done. But as so often happens, refugees live among the poorest areas in these countries because they tend to come without many resources. And so the burden of refugees in both Lebanon and Jordan and Turkey is born by the poorest people in those countries.

So the public education system is really only accessed by the poor in both those countries. So you have classrooms that, you know, go from having 20 students to having 35 students in them. And then many of them have also gone to a double shift system so that the Syrian children are educated in the afternoon which actually then shortens the school day for the Jordanian kids, and Jordanian or Lebanese teachers are hired to do the second shift.

So while these countries have been incredibly generous in making these things possible it has also been a burden on them and has lowered both their standards and qualities, and been disproportionately born by the poor in those countries.

MS. WINTHROP: Thanks, Jennifer. So I think we have about seven minutes left. There's many more questions than we'll have time for, so we'll take two just to service the questions, but then I would ask all of you to close, particularly Jennifer, Allan, and Rochelle. What is, sort of, the one thing you think needs to be done? We had a proposal put on the table by Mohammad about a regional university. What is one top thing that you think we could do? Then, Mohammad, we'll leave the last word for you to close.

Right here in the front in the blue shirt and then a little bit behind you.

QUESTIONER: Good morning. My name is Asati Tafra. I'm from Yasmine. It's a satellite content providing company here in the U.S. First, just to share my experience. In the late 80s and 90s I managed nine refugee camps in Somalia. I was (inaudible) and it was in the (inaudible). Always the difficulties where the young children and the school aged children, without fault of their own, always, you know, end up in that situation.

But today we have the technology. Of course, it may seem self-serving because I come from the satellite industry myself. I just came back from Africa, visiting three or four countries, and we are putting a satellite in our tablet to reach the remotest corners of Africa. Then our satellite that covers Africa and the whole Middle East also covers from Istanbul to Baghdad and many parts of Asia.

But my question is three points. First, is there a political way, really, to help these refugees, to educate them while they are in this situation? Of course, as Dr. Mohammad indicated, the best solution would be to have peace and they go home. But until they go home we have to educate them. So the first question is, is there a good political will from international organizations or those who advocate to really fund this kind of satellite? It's not expensive. It's the best option to reach the remotest areas on earth.

Also, are there digital contents, for instance, in Arabic that can be packaged and sent via satellite since most of these refugees speaks on Arabic? The third question is: can access be set up into the refugee camps? If we were to adopt this kind of technology we need to have access to the refugee camps at least to train the trainers on how to use these tablets, how to get satellite signals and things like that. So probably we may not solve this question on this forum, but I'll be happy to share after the program is concluded to share more.

MS. WINTHROP: Thank you.

QUESTIONER: But there is a solution, but it is a political way? Thanks.

MS. WINTHROP: Thank you very much. Right behind you.

QUESTIONER: Thank you. Hi my name is Ronit Avnery, the founder of localized and entity that allows ex-pats to give back their intellectual remittances remotely through mentorship and training in their language of choice.

I have two questions about what may exist and then two suggestions. One is, I'm curious if there's been a mapping of not only the professors that are in exile and in Syria, but what courses, what topics are they teaching? Just to understand what's available.

The second piece is this question of standards. Has there been an effort to map the difference between the Syrian standard, not at the high school level, but at the university level? Particularly among ex-pats, perhaps, who can translate the standards from their new countries to be able to say what is the gap between the two? So those are the two questions.

In terms of the recommendations, there are initiatives like ADRAQ which Queen Rania initially tried to do that box translation of MIT-EDX, found that it didn't work. Resorted to looking for Arabic speaking professors to teach in Arabic, and they don't have enough professors. So there are gaps, even in Jordan, among an initiative that is online education. They're looking for more educators, but this question of standards gap and subject gap is a salient one.

Similarly, nafham.com, which does online education of teenagers, K through 12, actually, online according to standard, country by country in the Middle East. I'm curious, who is connecting those dots, if they're being connected, and if not, who would be the right entity to do some of that connecting and mapping? Thank you.

MS. WINTHROP: Thank you. I welcome all of you to come and talk with the panelists afterwards because I don't think we'll have to time to get to all your questions or answer all your questions fulsomely. But in closing, Jennifer, let's start with you. What is the one thing we should really do?

MS. WINDSOR: I would just pick on connecting the dots. My observation is that, you know, we tend to operate in silos. There's a refugee silo. There's a displaced people silo. Even those two, you know, populations, and then there's a development silo. At Women for Women we kind of bridge those. But there's also, I think, real silos in education.

So, you know, higher education being connected to secondary school, to primary school, to informal education opportunities. If we're really going to create a movement and a real repository we have to be able to break down those silos. I'm not saying it's easy to do that, but I think thinking about we tend to -- the international community tends to take little -- they get onto a little fad that's only once piece of the elephant. If you don't look at the whole and how it comes together then our overall objective, which

is to rebuild peace and rebuild societies afterwards is going to fail.

MR. GOODMAN: There are approximately 20,000 institutes of higher education in the whole world now authorized to admit international students. Every one of them should take one Syrian.

MS. WINTHROP: Short and sweet, but impactful. Okay, Rochelle?

MS. DAVIS: One of the issues with online education, why people don't want to teach in Arabic in online education is because it's not recognized in those countries, and so nobody wants to waste their time. I mean, I don't want to teach in online education. I'm in America. It's really hard to teach online, and it takes a whole retooling of how you teach. It's a challenge.

What needs to be done? We need to stop the fighting in Syria and Iraq. I mean, the actual, and I'm not sure if we need to stop it be actually imposing more violence on these people. Syrians and Iraqis are incredibly sophisticated and well-educated people. They will rebuild their countries. We don't need to be involved in any of this. What we need to do is stop funding the war efforts that are going on, and we need to stop everyone else from funding all of the war efforts that are going on, and they will pick up the pieces and rebuild their countries.

MR. ALAHMAD: Thank you all for coming and for expressing such interest in the issues that concern us. I hope that you will communicate to those that you work with and that you know my earlier message about the incredible danger that will face us all if we don't address this issue of higher education in Syria.

It's not an issue only facing Syria, but of the whole world in terms of security, politics, and society. I hope that the world can understand this before it is too late.

MS. WINTHROP: Thank you. Please join me in thanking our panelists.

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