

Social and economic problems of the arab world



The Arab World refers to the 22 Arabic speaking countries located between the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the Arabian Sea in the east, and the Mediterranean Sea and Turkey in the north to the Indian Ocean and mid-Africa in the south. It consists of an area of around 14 million square kilometres, most of which is desert except for the coastal areas. There are approximately 250 million people living in the Arab World, with the majority being Muslims, although there are many from other religions too.

Historically, the Arab World was not divided into states, but now it is, and its 22 countries form many popular regions such as the Gulf area, the Middle East, North Africa and the Sahara. History, language, religion are some of the many unifying factors that exist in the consciousness of every Arab man. After gaining independence, some Arab states and some memorable Arab leaders tried their best to reunify the Arab World, but their efforts were in vain, especially after many failed attempts such as the rise of the United Arab Republic between Syria and Egypt in 1985. From then on, all Arab states set off on the journey of improving and developing themselves depending on their potential power. Although the Arab World is experiencing a state of stability, there are still many social and economical problems threatening the development of many of the Arab states.

The first problem to discuss here is unemployment in Arab countries, which is the highest in the world and threatens to spread poverty in the Arab World; “ the increase in the number of workers was not matched by an equal increase in employment in the Arab World and with the collapse of the oil revenues and the implementation of stabilization and structural adjustment program, employment growth slowed or became negative; as a result

unemployment increased” (1). According to the annual report of the Arab Labor Organization, 14% of the population are unemployed, which means that there are more than 17 million Arab people without work. There are many reasons for this: first, the failure of development due to the political situation in the Arab World. Civil wars and conflicts are considered the main obstacles that hinder development. Second, the poor economic performance of the Arab governments due to poor administrative tools and corruption. Third, the failure of education to meet the requirements of the job market and the neglect of technical and applied education, which is important to widen the labour market. Finally, the failure of the governments to create attractive investment opportunities that could increase the number of jobs that are available, and the weak laws that, if strengthened, could encourage investments. This dangerous problem has devastating effects, and so Arab states should do their best to encourage the private sector to increase the number of job opportunities for unemployed people. This can be achieved through issuing a number of laws to urge businessmen and companies to get involved in the national market. In addition to encouraging investment within the Arab World, investment in the Western countries should be encouraged, as well as opening the national market to foreign firms and companies to set up effective projects, which could help the national economy improve.

Another social problem in the Arab World is that women do not have access to all of the rights stated in the Islam religion, despite the fact that the majority of Arabs are Muslims. In Islam, women have the right to learn, to live a good life, to agree or refuse marriage, to work, and many others, and it is totally forbidden to deny them of any of these. In the Arab World, many

women are not given these rights, and in some Arab countries, girls under the age of 15 are forced to get married to older men without their consent. One example is a 12-year-old Yemeni girl, who was forced into marriage and then died during painful childbirth, which also killed her baby. Moreover, according to UN data, the proportion of women's representation in Arab parliaments is only 3.4% (as opposed to 11.4% in the rest of the world). In addition, 55% of Arab women are illiterate (2), and in many parts of the Arab World they are not allowed to continue their learning, despite this being a fundamental right in Islam that considers the education of women in particular as essential for the construction of society. Furthermore, women do not enjoy the right to vote in many Arab countries. For example in Kuwait, they do not have the right to elect until two years. This bad situation for women in the Arab World should be considered and analysed as soon as possible, because women's role in society cannot be denied, otherwise the whole of society will be threatened. Therefore, the improvement of education for women and the elimination of high female illiteracy rates in the Arab World is an urgent necessity, and can be achieved by making primary school education both free and compulsory.

The most dangerous problem in the Arab World is the widespread illiteracy, which is threatening future development. The UN report found that one third of Arabs are illiterate and only \$10 per person is spent on scientific research (3). The report also found that almost nine million children of primary school age are not attending school in the Arab World. Based on the general census of the population for the year 2004, the illiteracy rate among those aged 10 years and over was 45.7%, with a significant disparity between male and

female - males had an illiteracy rate of 29.8% as opposed to females at 62.1% (4). No one can deny how serious this problem is, since it is the cause of many other problems such as poverty, disease and death. The highest rate of illiteracy recorded is among women, since the female education in the Arab World is seen as less important, especially in rural areas. The Arabic governments, organisations and international organisations must cooperate and work together to reduce this high rate of illiteracy, and an enlightenment campaign must be held in the rural areas to let people know the importance of the education of women in society. Arab governments have to make education more accessible and increase the number of schools, especially in rural areas and deserts, where the rate of illiteracy among nomads is very high. They must also reward those who become literate. However, these plans are in vain if there is no money available, so a respectable amount of money should be specified for the purpose of fighting illiteracy among Arabic people. This money can support all efforts to improve education and be spent on helping poor people to continue learning, especially if we take into consideration that poverty is one of the main causes of illiteracy.

In conclusion, unemployment, illiteracy and the neglect of women are just some of the social and economic problems of the Arab World. Unemployment is a serious challenge because it is the cause of many social and economic problems, and can lead to an increase in crime, poverty, illiteracy and humiliation, as people who do not work do not have enough money to live a respectable life. Women in the Arab World should enjoy their rights that are stated in Islam because if they are educated, they can play an essential role in life, which benefits the whole of society. In Islam it is said that if you teach

a male, you teach an individual, but if you teach a female, you teach a whole nation. The last problem that we discussed was the problem of illiteracy in the Arab World and how this hinders progress and development, and causes many social and economic problems such as poverty and a high rate of fertility, which in turn is another serious problem. It is clear that all of these problems are related to each other in one way or another, so Arab governments must be aware of how to face these through working hard and planning to prevent them from worsening. Furthermore, rich Arab states such as Qatar and UAE can participate in the efforts to reduce the suffering in poor areas. For example, the campaign led by Dubai to help blind people get their sight back was a great success all over the world.

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