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opinion article

my story

excerpt

Civil society

Committee news



Dysfunction in the Educational System Leads to a Teachers' StrikeAbuse

Today, teachers in Northern Syria can only work on conveying their voice to defend the simplest of their rights, namely having a decent life, and to declare their failure to work, protest against low wages, and demand the improvement of the deteriorating educational situation.

This has been the second strike after teachers announced that they were striking for their rights and dignity last year in September (2021 – 2022). The strike continued until the beginning of the second semester and it was concluded with a 40% increase in wages. Before the strike a teacher's salary was TL 750 while it reached TL 1,100 after it was over.

This raise has not had any positive effects owing to the deterioration of the Turkish lira, which lost its value, as well as the increase of prices of all materials. Since the beginning of the summer holiday until the present day, teachers in northern Syria have resorted to go on protests and strikes in front of the buildings of directorates of education, the headquarters of the governor in Azaz city, and in other different places, including Soran, Jarablus, Akhtarin, and al-Bab.

The implications of this issue have had their impact on the society, especially because the continuation of strike will result in a higher illiteracy percentage among children, general weakness at the educational level, and school dropout due to undermining the value of schools and education among students. This might, in some cases, lead to the absence of values and good manners that are usually enshrined and promoted by educational institutions among children because schools are not only places for delivering information but are also institutions responsible for building generations at the moral, scientific, literal, and professional levels.

This issue has negative impacts on teachers as well because they are parents and they can't send their children to private schools, the costs of which range between \$200 – 300, while the current grant they receive is no more than \$65. This amount of money fails to cover a part of the expenditures for basic needs and it's often spent during the very first week of the month.

Teachers also suffer from the absence of rules of procedure, working mechanisms, and mechanisms of paying wages in the directorates of education, which don't take into consideration the years of experience and educational certificates the teacher has. Moreover, they suffer from the absence of a regulating system or controls that determine the mechanism of joining the teaching/educational service or terminating it (retirement).

One of the prominent requirements is the improvement of the educational services, including the provision of school books. Schools suffers from a dramatic shortage of books, educational materials, and school facilities.

In camps, real schools must be constructed and equipped well to replace the tents and caravans that are utilized as educational rooms.

There are also demands that directorates of education are all united under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and recognition of the Teacher's Union, which is supposed to represent the teaching staff and convey their demands and voices.

A group of teachers representing the Free Teachers' Union recommended several solutions to this

In the opinion column of our paper, we publish articles that reflects views of authors who wrote them and necessarily view Women Support Unit.

problem and raised them to Turkish Directorate of Education (Turkish supervision) and local councils, where those solutions took two directions.

First: by the Turkish supervision. The demands included increasing the grant allocated for the teachers, improving the curricula and ensuring they are all printed (some books, like social studies books, are not printed), committing to providing all books at the beginning of the school year, ensuring students' access to all books, replacing or enhancing the constructed schools, and providing educational means.

Second: by the local councils. Proposals included allocating a part of imports to support education, unifying the supervising bodies/institutions of the entire educational process in the region, exempting teachers from taxes (such as those of electricity and water), and providing a monthly food basket that also includes bread.

In September, the first National Conference of Pre-University Education was held on 23/9 this year (2022), which was called for by the Free Syrian Teachers' Union. The conference was attended by some professional unions while local councils were absent, which reflected their lack of desire to meet the teachers' demands and conclude solutions.

The most important recommendations raised during the conference were concentrated on improving the progress of the educational process and enhancing the reality within which the teachers live.

Teachers were directly threatened by the directorates of education in case strikes continue, but the Teachers' Union decided to ignore these threats and not give up until the demands are met.

In the light of the situation in Northern Syria and the continuing neglect of education, the society may experience a real educational catastrophe with the consequent of high level of ignorance, illiteracy, child labor, and the transition of scientific competencies to other fields of work that are completely away from education, due to the severe restrictions and the impossibility to secure a decent life.

I hope that education will be supported as it is the last haven and the torch that lights the path of the Syrian children.

Written by: Thanaa al- Toumaa



Simple Steps to Overcoming Challenges Violence

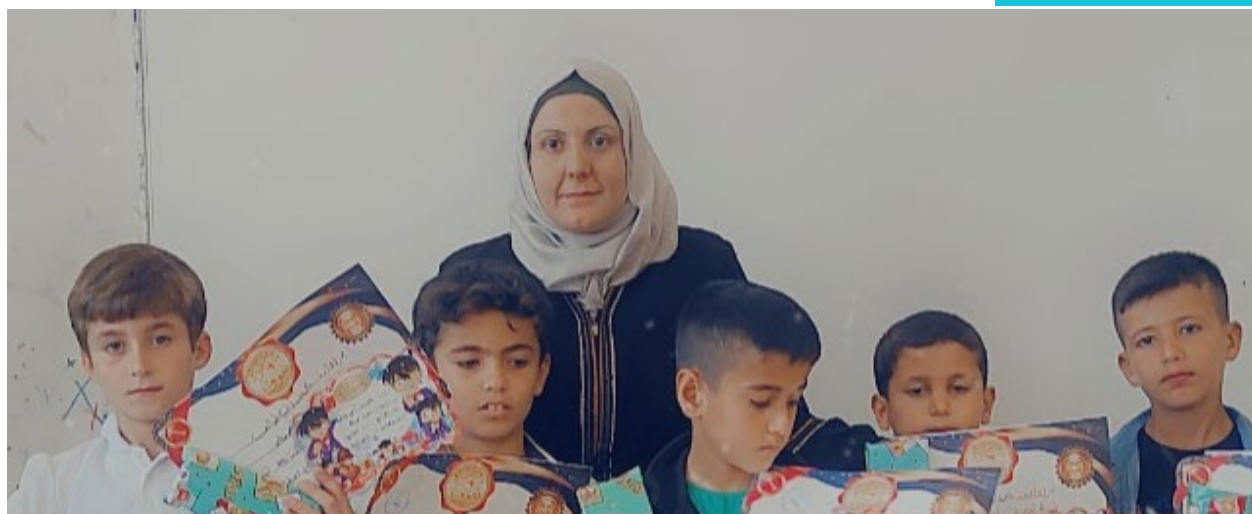
“My participation in the elections of the Teachers’ Union and winning the largest number of votes have been my greatest achievements”. With this happy statement, Sanaa Hasano told us her story.

Sanaa is a 30-year-old mother of one child and a CSO activist, who was born in Azaz City. She told us about her educational life saying: “After graduating from the Teacher Training Institute, I decided to go on for university. I enrolled in the Faculty of Education – Teacher Class. Teaching is a dream for me, and I have a great passion for this profession. I worked at a school in Azaz, but unfortunately after a while, some teachers and I faced many difficulties and challenges to the development of the educational process. Therefore, we decided to convey our voice to the bodies concerned through going on protests and holding dialog sessions to discuss the educational reality and the obstacles that stand against female teachers, especially the lack of nurseries in the schools we work leading to problems for teachers, who are mothers of small children. In addition, we face the problem of short maternity leaves, and the majority of Education Directorates in the liberated areas of Northern Syria don’t take teachers’ requests of a sick leave into consideration. We started restoring to protests due to the deteriorated

reality of all teachers especially with regards to the wages that are paid to the teachers but fail to cover, at least, their basic needs. The protests have been in vain, as no authority reacted to meet our demands. Therefore, there has been intermittent strikes until the situation developed to open strikes. Teachers decided to form a body that represents them and embraces their demands. The role of the teachers’ union was activated by allowing for teachers candidates. I took that step, stood as a teacher candidate, and I won the elections with the highest number of votes. I started working in the Teachers’ Union and I was the only female teacher to attend meetings along with a group of male teachers. I sensed people’s dissatisfaction but I decided to face and sometimes ignore this satisfaction until I was accepted”.

Sanaa concluded saying: “I would like to tell all the women in the world that they are capable of playing an effective role in all aspects of life. They just have to work hard on proving their efficiency and believe in themselves. I hope female teachers have a greater and more effective presence in the near future. I also hope that I serve as a role model in self-confidence and proficiency to prove to the entire society that women are capable of being leaders”.

Baseema Ibrahim



Civil Society’s Role in Pushing Education Forward

Civil society organizations have always played the role of a saver or invigorator in wars and crises in various areas.

In the Syrian context, civil society organizations were established right after the Syrian revolution was launched and they varied in the ways they operated and intervened.

Civil society organizations are absent from the scene in Northern Syria in particular and they have failed in fulfilling their role of sponsoring and invigorating the educational process, especially with the deteriorated educational situation in the area.

Since the beginning of the school year, teachers have been striking for school education in northern Syria, demanding an increase to the low wages paid to them. However, more than a month later, their strike had not resulted in any positive outcomes, which means that students are still receiving no education and teachers’ situation remains unchanged.

Simultaneously, professional and scientific syndicates and unions in Aleppo northern countryside called the local communities to attend the first national conference for education in free Syria, which was held on the auditorium of Free Aleppo University.

The syndicates invited the following bodies/figures:

- The educational offices in the local councils.
- The Ministry of Education in the Syrian Interim Government.
- The administration of Free Aleppo University.
- The Syrian Opposition Coalition.
- Educational experts.

- The organizations operating in the university education sector.

Azaz Local Council and representatives of the educational offices didn’t attend the conference (only one member of the educational offices attended the conference personally and unofficially).

The conference was concluded with the following outcomes:

1. Forming a coordination and follow-up committee for the conference outcomes consisting of:
 - Delegates from the Ministry of Education in the Syrian Interim Government.
 - Educational offices in the local councils.
 - Free Syrian Teachers’ Union.
 - Other bodies concerned with the educational process.
2. Working hard on the governance of the educational process in the liberated areas.
3. Consolidate efforts to support and develop the educational process in the liberated areas.
4. Accreditation of the Syrian Teachers’ Union as the only legal representative of teachers in the liberated areas.
5. Working on the establishment of a special fund for teacher support.
6. Communicating with the supporters of the educational process to help in the governance of the educational sector.
7. Working on the formation of a supervisory committee on the educational process.

In an interview made with one of the committee members, he highlighted that the committee formed as a result of the conference convened several meetings during which there was an emphasis on the committee's neutrality and its task of reaching mechanisms for compatibility among the different parties in the educational field.

The committee's first activities included indirect communication with both of the local council and the Teachers' Union as an attempt to converge views and reach adequate solutions that meet the teachers' demands, put an end to their strike, and reactivate the educational process. This has been in vain until the present day. Syrian students in Northern Syria are still out of their schools and the rate of school dropout is increasing day by day.

However, there are many viable solutions that contribute to ensuring teachers' rights and ending their strike, such as:

Local Councils' support of teachers through the funds raised from city resources (taxes and others).

Determining a simple enrolment fee that is affordable by all students of all categories.

Allow organizations to support the educational process, like university education, because if this

goal is achieved, the educational process will progress properly. Organizations can work on supporting teachers, ensuring good compensation, caring for the educational content, and providing other forms of assistance, such as specialized courses and trainings for the teachers, adequate teaching methodologies, and careful follow-up of the educational process. This is considered to be one of the best solutions, which can make change at all levels, if applied.

There are a lot of other solutions that can be put forward but they must be based on the foundations of simple waivers by the ruling authorities and the guarantor State, as well as on approval by the Teachers' Union to solve the issue of the strike.

Some people might ask:

Why is the educational situation in the liberated areas very complicated?

Why are teachers subjected to these challenges and constraints?

Why aren't CSOs given the opportunity to support the educational process?

Why is our share of ignorance increasing more and more?

subhia



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Education is the cornerstone of society, and the interruption of the educational process is a crisis prevailing in Northern Syria with dramatic effects on all the Syrian social groups. If teachers' strikes continue, people will have to resort to private educational institutes.

Hence, we should seek alternative solutions to contribute to the continuation of the educational process.

The following question was asked on our webpages with the aim of reaching out to people's relevant views:

What do you think is the optimal solution to save the Syrian children from the danger of ignorance and the Syrian teachers from poverty?

"We, as media professionals, must do our best to convey the voices of these children and teachers and help them survive the potential dangers".

Manar al-Hasan

"I believe that parents play the greatest role in helping their children during the course of their educational process".

Noor Haj Qasem

"Teachers are supposed to fulfill the task they are entitled to and convey the message of education despite the prevailing miserable conditions".

Shams al-Amal

"The only optimal solution would be raising teachers' salaries"

Ahmet Ahmet

NGOs must support the educational process in order to improve teachers' standard of living and ensure them a decent life. Education is the foundation block of the social construction".

Baseema Ibrahim



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The address

The geographical zone
of the WSY>S
Work: northern and eastern
countryside of Aleppo

