

Let's talk about Gaza

A Review of a Project on Media Objectivity

December 2016

Press House – Palestine is one of the partner organizations of Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Regional Office Palestine (RLS) in the Gaza Strip. Following its mission of working on empowering independent media and enhancing the quality of journalism in Palestine, Press House implemented a project on media objectivity in partnership with RLS during 2016. Bessan Shehada, project coordinator of RLS in the Gaza Strip talked to Sahar Adnan Sarsour who is working as project coordinator for Press House – Palestine, about the importance of the project and how it affected the participants' approach to their profession as journalists.

What is Press House?

Press House – Palestine or Bait Al-Sahafa (BAS) is an independent, non-profit media institution working on issues related to media and freedom of expression. BAS was founded in January 2013 through an initiative of a group of journalists and opinion makers who are



concerned with the state of Palestinian journalism and the way it is fulfilling its main task of actualizing democracy. BAS aims at establishing a unique model of cooperation and exchange with various sectors of the Palestinian civil society on the basis of partnership and integration. Headquartered in Gaza, BAS is currently planning to expand its outreach through opening other branches that will contribute to enhance freedom of expression and to increase the quality of Palestinian media through capacity building, training, advocacy, and

networking programs, on the principles of human rights including equality and non-discrimination.

Can you tell me about the project BAS which has been implemented in partnership with RLS?

The project is called 'Promoting objective media in Gaza'. It aims at developing the capacity of thirty young media graduates on media objectivity techniques in the Gaza Strip and increasing their knowledge on employing media objectivity in advocacy and lobbying

through a wide range of activities, for example training courses, exchange meetings, awareness sessions, university workshops and media conferences.

Why is the project important?

Media in Palestine lacks objectivity: There is no respect for people's views and their freedom of expression. The project focuses on the principle of building an objective background that is apart from extremism, intolerance and incitement. Moreover, these groups of fresh journalists lack opportunities of training in unique media subjects. The project has provided the target group with the opportunity of widening their concepts of several topics, such as investigative reports. Moreover, the practical side of the journalistic education is very weak at our universities. That is why we can barely find qualified media graduates that can actually compete in the labor market. The project has given them the opportunity of being trained in the field where they practiced the work of professional journalists in detail. Within three months, 15 out of 30 were selected to receive training at Sawa Agency, where each of them produced more than two reports monthly.

Have you been observing any change in the participants' lives?

The project has definitely affected the youngsters' lives in a positive way. They confirmed that participating in the project added much to their knowledge, to the extent that they now see themselves as well-qualified journalists. The project also helped them in eliminating their fear



of getting involved in the journalism field. Their confidence has been built up as they were provided a platform for publishing their own articles. Adding up to this, they have been gaining knowledge about technical methods to advocate for the Palestinian cause through writing and media campaigns. They confirmed that they are now able to create media strategies that are capable of reaching the international community.

As project coordinator, what did you gain from this experience?

I enjoyed every single moment I spent with the trainees. They were happy of receiving something special, and I was more than happy that I was a bridge for this knowledge. I met veteran leaders and journalists who gave courses and educational sessions. One more thing is that the university meetings were very successful. I will not forget when one of media students at Al-Azhar University came to me after the workshop. She wanted to express her gratitude to BAS for holding such sessions. She told me: "I made up my mind two days ago to

transform my major and join education instead because I didn't feel that the university could help me make my dream of being a professional journalist become true. Yet, after this workshop, I decided to go on and help myself." That moment, I realized that we were actually doing something great.

Are there any success stories that you would like to share with us?

All of the participants devoted great efforts throughout the project, which demonstrated their great fantasy to go on. The project was a turning point in the lives of many of them. Many received job opportunities after they wrote good and objective articles, like Sumaya Telakh, who has recently worked as a journalist freelancer for Al-Jazeera website. Mohammad Doud also received an award for writing the best radio show within a competition conducted by BAS. Ahed Olwan and Nevin Halawa were selected after the project ended to work at Sawa Agency as professional journalists. Others joined media institutions to receive more training.