

# MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE ACADEMY

**GIJTR PARTNERS:** Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSV);  
Fundación de Antropología Forense de Guatemala (FAFG); International Coalition  
of Sites of Conscience (ICSC); Public International Law & Policy Group (PILPG)

**GIJTR PARTNERS:** January 2016 to March 2021



An awareness-raising workshop on transitional justice for Moroccan youth. The workshop was led by a participant in the TJ MENA Academy with financial and programmatic support from the GIJTR.

## BACKGROUND

In order for transitional justice processes to be effective in establishing peaceful societies, the public must have an understanding of their practical workings and larger, restorative aims – knowledge that is often missing in post-conflict societies, where silence and misinformation are all too common. To address this need in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the Global Initiative for Justice, Truth and Reconciliation (GIJTR) established the MENA Transitional Justice Academy (MENA TJ Academy) in 2016, which provides activists, academics, practitioners, survivors and other non-traditional actors with the skills and funds to design and implement transitional justice programs in local communities across the region to increase awareness of these processes among the public, and ensure their voices are included in them.

The MENA TJ Academy is the first year-long course of its kind to combine theoretical modules on transitional justice mechanisms and key debates within the field with more practical project development sessions that focus on incubation and development in high-risk environments, with an emphasis on security and sustainability. A vital component to the MENA TJ Academy is the sub-grant process, which provides participants with financial and programmatic support to implement innovative justice and reconciliation projects with broad community consultation. As a result of these programs, local communities – including survivors of conflict, youth, women, and activists, who are often left out of such discussions – feel invested in these processes, which makes them far more likely to succeed. As a whole, the MENA TJ Academy has also made great strides in broadening participants' knowledge of transitional justice tools, creating a peer-learning network, and encouraging community participation in defining transitional justice options for local needs across the region.

## OBJECTIVES

1. Increase the capacity of activists, academics, practitioners and non-traditional actors in the MENA region to understand transitional justice tools, with a focus on participatory methodologies and local forms of transitional justice to ensure widespread impact;
2. Establish and support a community-driven regional network of transitional justice practitioners, activists, academics and non-traditional actors who can support one another for years to come; and
3. Strengthen community participation in defining transitional justice options and crafting mechanisms that respond to local needs, which is crucial to ensuring the success of any transitional justice process.

## KEY ACTIVITIES TO DATE

- **TJ Academy I and II:** The first and second Academy participants gained in-depth knowledge of the central ideas and debates in the field of transitional justice and hands-on experience in community engagement. The cohorts comprised a total of 35 participants, hailing from eight countries in the region — Libya, Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Iraq, Syria and Yemen. The trainings for each cohort consisted of three to four participatory sessions each, in which participants actively engaged on the theory and practices of truth-telling, accountability, reparations, institutional reform, documentation, memorialization and gender mainstreaming. Moreover, a private online platform was provided for the groups to share experiences, challenges and best practices in their work, and learn from each other, which is crucial to sustaining the Academy's mission after it formally ends.
- **Virtual TJ Academy III:** In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the GIJTR adopted a virtual curriculum for the third MENA TJ Academy using diverse online platforms to accommodate the various accessibility needs of project participants. The cohort comprises 12 participants from Yemen, Iraq, Syria, Morocco and Tunisia. All participants have access to a MENA TJ Academy resource center that houses a substantial collection of in-depth presentations and video material in both Arabic and English developed specifically for the Academy, alongside relevant Arabic-language publications and additional resources on transitional justice and questions for reflection. GIJTR partners are also maintaining cross-cultural and knowledge sharing by offering creative opportunities for virtual engagement among the GIJTR and participants as well as hosting discussions by regional experts on topics including gender and transitional justice, transitional justice and awareness raising, and the relevance of transitional justice in the MENA region.
- **Implementation of Community-Based Projects:** In each Academy, participants received technical and financial assistance through a grant process to design and implement community-based projects in their local communities. A total of 25 projects have been successfully implemented through two cohorts to date, with 12 additional projects currently being implemented by the MENA TJ Academy III participants. Successful past projects have included activities such as the collection of oral histories from the Faili Kurdish community on the Iraq/Iran border, which was subsequently used to create a memory book to raise awareness among the general public; the creation of an educational training of trainers toolkit on transitional justice and civic engagement in Morocco; the construction of a memorial at a notorious border crossing in Yemen; the organization of awareness-raising workshops on sexual and gender-based violence for Syrian refugees with an economic empowerment component; and the monitoring and documentation of the specialized judicial chambers established in the wake of the Tunisian truth commission to investigate cases of gross human rights violations.

## KEY IMPACT TO DATE

- **Creation of a Sustainable Regional Network:** The three cohorts of the MENA TJ Academy to date have resulted in a regional network for participants to continue engaging and assisting each other in their work following the completion of trainings and community projects. This network endeavors to highlight the specific peace and justice needs within the region and provide opportunities for regional advocacy campaigns on transitional justice. Crucial to the sustainability of the project, the network is indicative of how the MENA TJ Academy can be leveraged by activists, practitioners, academics and non-traditional actors to further support their efforts. In addition, participants of the three cohorts have committed to mentoring and recruiting subsequent participants through the network, especially during the design and implementation of their community projects. Sharing information and lessons learned through the network is an important step in establishing a strong cohort of experts who are approaching transitional justice engagement in a holistic and community-focused manner.
- **Establishment of Long-Term Community-led Transitional Justice Projects:** Following the implementation of their community-developed projects with technical and financial support from the GIJTR, many of the projects were institutionalized by the organizations and local networks with which participants had partnered. Despite significant challenges and context-specific security risks, participants advanced in implementing their projects and identified avenues for the continuation of their work beyond the subscribed duration of the Academy. The MENA TJ Academy therefore provided a space for participants to effectively incubate their ideas, while also ensuring local ownership and sustainability of the projects outside of the Academy.

## UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

- **Implementation of Community-Based Projects for TJ Academy III:** The GIJTR will continue to provide programmatic and financial support to the MENA TJ Academy III participants, who are working on a range of community projects including the creation of a memory book and short documentary film commemorating the stories of the victims who were killed in the Wasit protests in Iraq; a comparative study of constitutional texts that have included transitional justice mechanisms in order to inform the inclusion of such processes in the Syrian constitution; and the creation of a reading corner at the Museum of Collective Memory of Nomadic Culture in Morocco that provides books, documents, and references related to transitional justice, memory, and the history of conflict and past human rights abuses in the region.
- **Curriculum Development:** In-depth presentations and video materials will be further developed for the MENA TJ Academy resource center which will be used to support future and past Academy participants in a range of settings.
- **Expanding Institutional Links:** The GIJTR will create a network of academic institutions and organizational partners to ensure further sustainability of the Academy.



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