



Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization

ALECSO Initiative for the Education of Arab Children in Conflict Zones (Syria, Yemen, Libya, Iraq, Somalia) and the challenges of education in the state of Palestine under Israeli occupation



Tunisia - March

2017

(updated in light of Member States' observations and
Economic and Social Council's discussions (99th session))





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Arab Children in Conflict Zones
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Introduction:

The difficult circumstances currently experienced by the Arab region pose a tremendous challenge not only to the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO), but also to all Arab States, and to the world as a whole. In fact, in many parts of the Arab World, the situation has almost gone out of control, and conflicts are ravaging all that has been achieved from the period of Independence till the so-called "Arab Spring". ALECSO has thus been confronted with an exceptional situation at a time when it is moving forward toward achieving the goals spelled out in its constitution, particularly the promotion of Arab intellectual unity through education, culture and sciences.

Amidst these unprecedented challenges and exceptional circumstances, the choices for ALECSO are hard and limited. In fact, the bloody armed conflicts in several Arab countries have had adverse effects on security and stability in the region, and have accordingly curbed the ALECSO's ability to act in one of its fields of competence, i.e., education, in order to salvage whatever is left to be saved. For children in the target regions are unfortunately not in school; they are rather in refugee camps, in areas of internal displacement, or in the open.

Committed to Arab and international children's rights instruments, particularly the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1924), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the Charter of the Arab Child's Rights (1984), and the Arab Charter on Media of the Rights of the Child (2004), as well as to the protocols and recommendations adopted by conferences on the rights of children in general, and of Arab children in particular, ALECSO submits this initiative in pursuit of the following vision :

Vision:

The underlying rationale of this initiative is the need for urgent and post-settlement intervention in order to ward off the adverse consequences that would result from depriving millions of Arab children and youth of their right to education and growth without discrimination, as these may relapse into illiteracy; they may even fall into the clutches of extremist groups and criminal organizations involved in drug-trafficking, sexual exploitation, and other scourges.

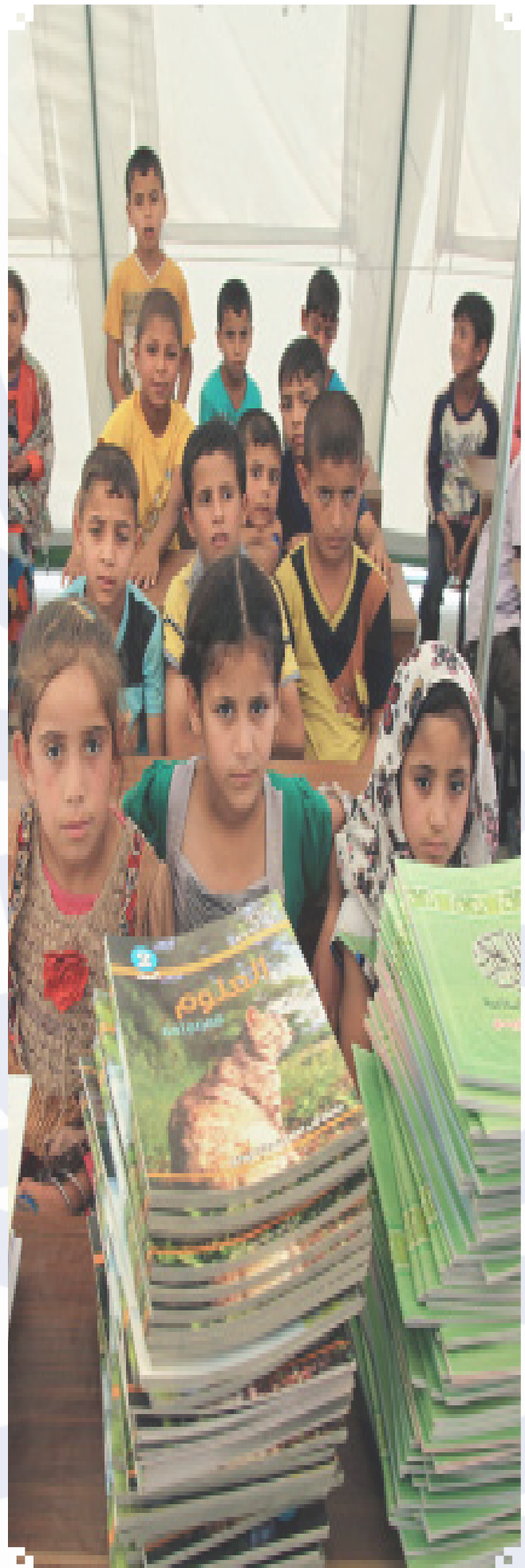
Scope of the initiative:

Given the nature of the Organization's work, the initiative involves providing specialized technical assistance, and producing adequate learning, training, and awareness materials adapted to the needs of children and youth affected by the special circumstances they are experiencing. The initiative will be implemented in coordination with other stakeholders (States and organizations).

I – Current status and objectives of the initiative:

1. A snapshot of the current situation:

Given the complex military and political situation on the ground, it would be difficult to draw an accurate picture of the educational deprivation suffered by Arab children in conflict zones, or to develop a replicable



model of urgent educational intervention that is fit for all situations.

According to the information available on the official websites of the international institutions working in conflict zones, the situation is of extreme difficulty. Children at school age have no access to formal education (UNICEF report – September 2015). In Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya, nearly 13.5 million children (around 40% of the total number of children in these countries) are out of school.

The UNOCHA “Humanitarian Needs Overview Report – Yemen 2016” provides the following indicators on the state of schools in Yemen :

Schools	Number
Schools damaged by the war	1400
Schools transformed into shelters for IDPs	400
Schools occupied by armed groups (from the beginning of the school year 2015–2016)	75

A statement issued by the Libyan Ministry of Education (September 2015) in response to the UNICEF “Education Under Fire” report, indicates that despite the difficult and exceptional conditions suffered by the education sector in Libya, all elementary and secondary schools have opened up their doors for



pupils and students during the past four years. Moreover, alternative spaces have been provided for students whose schools have been destroyed, are located in fighting zones, or are being used as shelters. Temporary Libyan schools were opened in Tunisia and Egypt for externally displaced children.

With regard to Iraq, the UNICEF report (2015) estimates that nearly 2 million children do not go to school on a regular basis, and 1.2 million children are likely to find themselves out of school. Concerning the education infrastructure, nearly 5300 schools in Iraq (20% of the total number of schools in

the country) are no longer usable, having been destroyed, or transformed into shelters for displaced families, or even used for military purposes by the conflicting parties. This state of affairs has resulted in overcrowded classrooms in the remaining schools which operate on a double-shift or even three-shift basis, with nearly 60 students per classroom. Moreover, nearly 1400 teachers have been forced to escape from continuous violence.

On their part, Palestinian schools in the occupied territories and in refugee camps in neighboring countries are exposed to repeated Israeli assaults. Despite the efforts exerted by UNRWA as well as by Arab States, the General Secretariat of the Arab League, ALECSO, and other regional and international organizations and CSOs, the education sector in Palestine is still in need of urgent support and assistance, as stated in the statement issued by the 25th joint meeting between the Arab League Council of Educational Affairs for the People of Palestine and the senior management of the UNRWA Education Programme (November 2015). The statement exhorted donor states and the concerned Arab and international organizations to continue supporting the UNRWA budget and to respond to its urgent calls for providing assistance and support to the Palestinian refugee community.

The statement also denounced the deteriorating educational conditions in the occupied city of al-Quds al-Sharif, as a result of the systematic destruction of Palestinian education by the Israeli occupation authorities, and the isolation of Arab neighborhoods from each other, which impedes the movement of students, teachers and staff. Besides, the wall of separation has adverse effects on the provision of the necessary educational services to the Palestinian refugee students.

2. Categorization of beneficiaries:

The possibility of intervention to provide educational services to the target groups varies across regions and largely depends on security and living conditions. Beneficiaries can be categorized as follows :

- Children in refugee camps,
- Children in schools in host countries and in areas of internal displacement,
- Children in conflict zones.

In terms of educational needs, education-deprived Arab children in conflict zones can be categorized as follows :

- Children at school age,
- Children and youth at the age of elementary (compulsory) and secondary education,
- Youth having received some basic education but are likely to be forced

- out of school and relapse into illiteracy.

3. General goals of the initiative:

Proceeding from ALECSO's commitment to its reference documents, and in view of the difficult current situation and its grave implications on the future of the Arab World, the initiative is intended to serve the following goals :

- Alleviate the effects of conflicts and occupation on the schooling of Arab children;
- Dry up the sources of illiteracy resulting from the educational deprivation of Arab children in conflict zones;
- Meet the needs of Arab children in conflict zones in terms of basic skills (reading, writing and Mathematics);



- Contribute to meeting the training needs of teachers and learning facilitators in conflict zones.

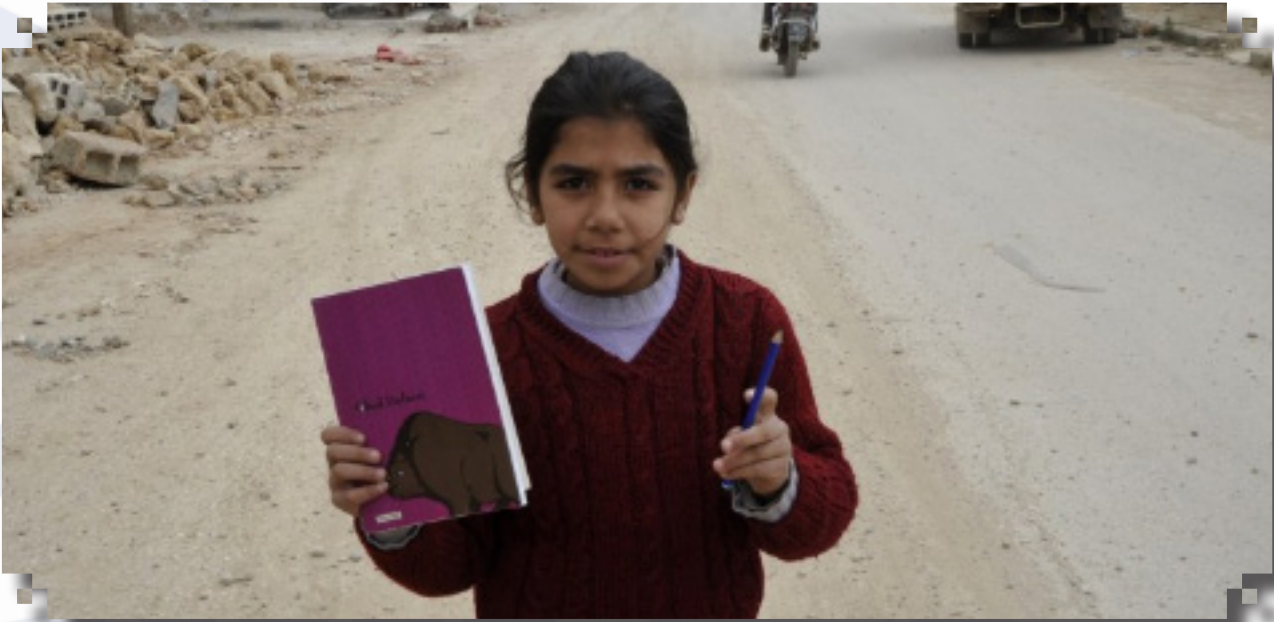
II – Content of the initiative:

In light of the aforementioned goals, various forms of educational intervention are proposed to meet the needs of education-deprived children in conflict zones :

1. Provide urgent educational assistance to children, teachers and educators in conflict zones, through :
 - Conducting field visits, whenever possible, to refugee camps and areas of displacement, to assess the situation, prepare reports, draw up the lists of beneficiaries and

identify their educational needs, in coordination with the concerned bodies and authorities on the ground;

- Producing training materials for teachers, learning facilitators and educational staff



for the management of classrooms, especially those involving various levels.

2. Provide basic skills of reading, writing, Mathematics and sciences for school-age children (Grade 3 of primary education), through :

- Providing digital contents (when the access infrastructure is available) in Arabic language, Mathematics and sciences (early grades of primary education), in the form of easy-to-use learning applications;
- Developing the contents of a number of educational or leisure applications (games) designed by Arab youth as part of the "ALECSO Mobile Apps. Award", along with cartoons applications, in cooperation with TV stations, to serve as sources of learning for children.

3. Cooperate with UNHCR to enable children and youth enrolled in elementary and secondary education to go back to school and pursue their education, through :

- Coordinating with educational authorities in conflict-affected countries for the implementation of their educational curricula by the host countries and the bodies working in displacement areas, and for the accreditation and validation of certificates;

- Helping in the printing and distribution of textbooks for students, along with other necessary aids and means in accordance with the approved curricula;
 - Making the educational and training materials previously produced by the Organization as part of the program for the improvement of educational quality available online on ALECSO website and through electronic platforms (when the access infrastructure is available), along with a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) with guiding instructions adapted to the needs of the target groups.
4. Protect youth (especially girls) who have already received some elementary education and who may, as a result of the current circumstances, be forced out of school, from relapsing into illiteracy, through :
- Training volunteer teachers and learning facilitators to implement informal programs to protect youth from falling back into illiteracy;
 - Producing educational and training contents (learning resources, evaluation tools, manuals, training toolkits) as part of informal education, including literacy programs, vocational training programs...etc.
5. Provide educational/psychological protection for children and other vulnerable groups, and strengthen their coping capacity, through producing TV and online spots, short films, and posters for guidance and sensitization, so as to cope with the psychological and behavioral disorders of children resulting from the painful experience they have endured.



6. Coordinate with UNICEF and UNHCR to provide the necessary assistance to children with disabilities, through :

- Coordinating with the competent authorities and working bodies to identify and categorize children in refugee camps and in areas of displacement;
- Providing teachers and volunteers with training in dealing with children with disability;
- Offering adapted educational technical aids.

The initiative is open and flexible, as the nature and degree of intervention vary across conflict zones and according to the qualitative and quantitative needs identified.

Post-conflict stage:

The post-conflict stage needs advance planning and preparation, especially with regard to the rehabilitation or rebuilding of educational systems in the concerned countries (conflict-affected states and neighboring host states). This action should be undertaken as part of a comprehensive Arab plan, with priority given to higher education systems as these will produce the qualified and competent elite capable of undertaking the action of reconstruction and sustainable development.

The post-conflict stage also needs intensive awareness-raising campaigns aimed at restoring and rebuilding value systems and attitudes adopted by the people of these societies, so that they will be prepared to accept the different one, coexistence, constructive dialogue and other values necessary for the post-settlement phase.



III – Mechanisms for the implementation of the Economic and Social Council Resolution (Resolution 2131, 99th ordinary session, February 2, 2017)

For the implementation of this resolution, we propose the following :

1. Setting up a high commission for the governance of the initiative. This body will be composed of the concerned states (affected and host States), along with the Arab, regional and international organizations active in this field.
 - a. Affected States : Iraq, Yemen, Libya, Syria, Palestine and Somalia, through their representatives in ALECSO Executive Council, or through the officials nominated by their respective governments to be members of the Commission;
 - b. States hosting refugees, and donor States : Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and other States willing to join;
 - c. Arab Organizations : Arab Red Crescent and Red Cross Organization (ARCO), Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU);
 - d. Regional and international organizations : ISESCO, UNESCO (Office in Beirut), UNICEF, UNHCR.
2. Forging partnerships with the concerned organizations, particularly ARCO and UNHCR, and cooperating with them in collecting the needed information to identify educational, training and awareness needs of Arab children who are refugees, displaced or under occupation in the countries covered by the initiative;
3. Providing part of the financing of the initiative through adjusting some of the activities planned under the 2017-2018 budget so that they fall in line with the goals of the initiative; and coordinating with Palestine and Somalia to adjust some of the projects planned under the budgets allocated to them;
4. Opening a special bank account to receive donations from States, bodies and individuals as part of the funding of the initiative, in conformity with applicable rules in the unified working system of specialized Arab organizations; making the bank account widely known, and subjecting it to financial oversight.

Roles of implementing parties:

a) Tasks of the high Commission for the governance of the initiative :

- Publicize the initiative, rally support to it, and search for sources of funding;
- Conduct field visits to have a closer look at conditions in the target zones.

b) Tasks of ALECSO (in coordination with the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States) :

- Coordinate the work of the high commission for the governance of the initiative;
- Open the bank account to receive donations;
- Undertake the technical supervision of the production of educational, training, and awareness materials in accordance with the identified needs;
- Submit periodic progress reports to the Executive Council and the Economic and Social Council.