



Published: 30 September 2011

Region: MENA

The movement to bring democracy and change across the Middle East means giving citizens a voice and open discussion of diversity issues through inclusive public debates say leading academics from the region.

A group of journalism and communication researchers and teachers from seven Middle East and North African countries and South Sudan met to discuss these challenges at a Media Diversity Institute (MDI) workshop in Tunis on 23-25 September.

The workshop considered new teaching modules and the academics underlined the importance of inclusive public debates. The role of journalism in the reform process could have been greater, they said, if media was more reflective of diversity in their societies.

"The reality of diversity is a fact of life in all countries -- even the most undemocratic, but media are limiting the voices that are heard," said Milica Pesic, MDI Executive Director. 'Media educators, even those in the most democratic countries, need to take up the challenge of teaching their students how to be inclusive'.

Academics from Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, Mauritania and the youngest member of the UN, South Sudan, joined colleagues from the United Kingdom in looking for ways in which media coverage of diversity can be included in journalism and communication university courses.

They agreed that apart from ethnicity, religion, gender, age, disability and human rights, political and language diversity should be included in the new curricula.

The workshop was funded by UNESCO and the UK Embassy in Tunis and provided an opportunity for the academics to come with new Reporting Diversity module ideas. In a four-week process until the end of October they will be assisted by MDI alumni in developing new modules. In addition, MDI will provide a virtual space for their networking and exchange of teaching materials.

Among the participants are leading British and MENA academics, experts in the field of media and diversity, such as Dr Naomi Sakr, Westminster University (UK), Dr Rasha Abdullah, American University Cairo (Egypt), Dr Verica Rugar, Cardiff University (UK), as well as previous MDI trainees from Morocco, Jordan, Mauritania, Algeria, and Tunisia. The workshop was hosted by Le Institut de Presse et des Sciences de l'Information (IPSI), Tunisia.