



ICRD Monthly Update

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Reform In The Kingdom



With the world slowly becoming less reliant on Saudi Arabian oil, the country finds itself at a crossroads. The need to produce a new generation of youth who can operate effectively in the globalized marketplace has become all-too-apparent, both for economic reasons and to provide a compelling alternative to the appeals of extremism. Toward this end, ICRD has made substantial progress over the past several years in facilitating educational reform in the Kingdom, particularly as it relates to purging the contentious Wahhabist content from its public school textbooks and teacher training programs that has been inspiring the extremism of groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS.

The latest milestone in this process took place this past November as we convened a team of Saudi and American education scholars and experts at Georgetown University to discuss problems of bias and intolerance in national education systems. The meeting, which also included officials from the Saudi Ministry of Education and the U.S. Departments of State and Education, also addressed a number of key principles for advancing educational reform in the Muslim world and the West.

Finally, the head of the Saudi delegation gave a detailed presentation on the country's new National Strategy for Educational Reform, which was promulgated a year after our study had made its way to the Kingdom through diplomatic channels. This new strategy, which will be funded at a level of \$22 billion over four years, focuses on (1) additional textbook revisions, (2) teacher training, (3) new curriculum standards, and (4) development of 21st century skills, including those relating to cross-cultural communications. The ultimate goal is to create "global citizens" who, in addition to being professionally competent, are instilled with values of tolerance, human rights, and critical thinking.

The meeting was highly successful and represented the latest step in advancing educational reform through quiet diplomacy. It concluded with a discussion of additional topics to be researched in preparation for a follow-on meeting to take place in Riyadh at the end of May.

With best wishes,



Douglas Johnston
President, ICRD

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