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Lebanese
Emigration
Research
Center

Dr. Guita Hourani Participated in the Debate on Media and Migration at UNESCO - Paris

LERC Staff

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At the invitation of UNESCO in Paris, Dr. Guita Hourani, Director of the Lebanese Emigration Research Center (LERC) at Notre Dame University-Louaize in Lebanon, participated in the debate on media and migration during a thematic debate organized by UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC).

The debate was attended by ambassadors to the UNESCO including His Excellency Dr. Khalil Karam of Lebanon who came especially to hear Dr. Hourani. The audience was also made up of government representatives and international media experts.

Dr. Hourani presented a brief report on the media coverage of refugees in Lebanon particularly the Syrian refugees where she illustrated how the schism within the Lebanese government in terms of supporting the Syrian regime or the "revolution" fueled the already contentious political environment in the country which in turn reflected on the media's portraying of the refugees. She went on to explain how, as the crisis in Syria became protracted and as the number of the Syrian refugees exceeded 1.2 million, the media began hammering down the negative impact of their presence in Lebanon reflecting the socio-political context of the country, but also the political proclivities of the media outlets.

Dr. Hourani stated that with the rapid advance of armed extremist groups, the refugee crisis developed into a security issue. As various terrorist/jihadi groups begun to infiltrate the refugee communities, media reports were magnifying this matter furthering the wedge between the host and the refugee communities.

Dr. Hourani said that in their reporting, almost all the newspapers, electronic media outlets, TVs and Radios in Lebanon, used racist and pejorative words and engaged in stereotyping and labeling of refugees. She added that foreign correspondents were not better especially when writing about the Lebanese in regard to the Syrian refugee crisis.

In her recommendations, Dr. Hourani called for intensifying training journalists to be accurate, fair and balanced in their reporting and to teach them how to equip them with proper research

and analysis skills to do in-depth reporting and proper feature stories and supporting journalists and media outlet from among the refugees to be the voices of their communities among others.

The IPDC “is the only multilateral forum in the UN system designed to mobilize the international community to discuss and promote media development. The Programme not only provides support for media development projects but also stimulates international debate on important media-related issues.”

After the debate, the IPDC Bureau “agreed on follow-up action to promote best practices of professional reporting on this issue and high ethical standards in this field.”