

Advisory Committee Meeting

Amman, 16 November 2022



Swedish Dialogue Institute
for the Middle East and North Africa



Summary report

On November 16th the Advisory Committee of the Swedish Dialogue Institute held its first meeting, which took place in connection to the formal inauguration of the Institute and a regional conference on 'Inclusivity in Peace and Development'. The meeting was attended by eleven¹ of the Committee's thirteen members.

The meeting served as an occasion for the Advisory Committee to become more familiar with the work and vision of the Institute, for team building and exchanges, and for the Institute to get valuable input for its future work plan. The discussions covered insights regarding regional trends and development, as well as advice on target groups, areas of work and methods.

As regards the **regional situation** the members of the Advisory Committee pointed to the monumental shifts and developments over the past decade, both at global and regional levels. They underlined the region's complexity and the great diversity of political and economic conditions between different countries and sub-regions. They also emphasised that so called "soft security" is at heart of security in the region. Yet much of the security thinking, both in the region and in Europe, is seen from narrow-minded "hard security" lenses and this needs to shift.

¹ Members attending were: Noha al-Mikawy, Noura Berrouba, Rola Dashti, Hafsa Halawa, Nassif Hitti, Nadim Houry, Asma Khalifa, Rouzbeh Parsi, Omar Razzaz, Magnus Schöldtz, Simone Susskind.

Committee members stressed the **need for dialogue**, not least to bridge the gaps of trust, by making available spaces for exchanges, dialogues, and trust-building. *“Today less dialogues are happening, when more dialogues are desperately needed,”*, as one Committee member put it. It was argued that many so-called dialogues, tend to be ticking of a box, rather than a genuine attempt to bring different perspectives together for frank and honest conversations.

All the Institute’s **focus** areas - peace, development and inclusive participation and EU-MENA relations - were seen as highly relevant and important. The Institute was seen as having a particularly good position to work on inclusive participation and was advised to aim for broad inclusivity in all or most activities. Furthermore, the Institute was advised to focus on regional and cross-boundary activities and networking, and to further develop intersectional and interdisciplinary work, as well as continuing emphasising gender balanced and intergenerational dialogues.

The Advisory Committee considered **networking** as one of the Institute’s primary areas of strength. While networking in the MENA region is shaping up, there is a huge need and potential to do more. Here the Institute was advised to (while developing its own networks) collaborate with others in further developing the skills of building, maintaining, and developing networks. *“Networking takes time, is hard, but it is the best investment we can make for a better future.”*

In additional to **engaging with actors** from state institutions, civil society, international organisations, media and think tanks, etc., the Institute was advised to “think out of the box” and expand the networks to include stakeholders amongst for example cultural actors, faith-based organisations, local authorities, grassroot organisations and private sector. The Committee also stressed the importance of amplifying the marginalized voices as well as broadening the networking to go beyond dialogues only amongst already like-minded. This includes a need to gradually broaden networks, as well as develop thinking around how to deal with potential “spoilers”. Another recommendation was to look at who in the region is driving change – or could drive change. How can they be identified and engaged?

In terms of **methods**, the Institute was advised to work for a balance between open- and closed-door meetings. These could and should take place in parallel. Members of the Committee stressed the essential importance of agenda setting, by way of asking questions. They also highlighted the advantages of co-creation of programs and for allowing organic development of programs to make sure that they become relevant to participants. An idea was presented on thinking about developing a “dialogue tool-box”, where best-practices in agenda setting, meeting procedures, etc. could be inspiring to others.

The Institute was seen as having a **comparative advantage**, thanks to Sweden's generally good standing in the region, which gives the Institute a good potential to serve as a safe space for meaningful exchanges between diverse actors – state actors, civil society, private sector etc. - who might otherwise not meet at a levelled playing field.

Furthermore, the Advisory Committee strongly welcomed that the Institute's mandate puts on EU-MENA dialogue. Several members of the Committee pointed to "*a broken dialogue*" and called for developing better dialogues and policy making between partners, respecting needs and interests from different groups in the societies on both sides of the Mediterranean. This requires humbleness and a move away from the perceived "Eurocentric" dialogues.

Discussing expectations on **what the Institute can achieve** the Committee argued that the Institute can contribute to networking, experience sharing and strengthening the spaces of collaborations in the MENA region and between the region and Europe. While it was recognised that the dialogues have value in themselves, the members of the Committee highlighted the Institute's well-placed role in also contributing to inform and influence policy making, by contributing with ideas and recommendations through reporting from various meetings and conferences.



Members of the Advisory Committee meeting the staff of the Dialogue Institute.

Members of the Advisory Committee

Chairman of the Advisory Committee:

Dr. Omar Razzaz, former Prime Minister of Jordan

Members of the Advisory Committee:

Dr. Noha al-Mikawy, Dean of the School of Global Affairs and Public Policy AUC

Ms. Noura Berrouba, President National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations/LSU

Dr. Rola A. A. H. Dashti, Executive Secretary UN ESCWA

Ms. Hafsa Halawa, analyst/development expert

Dr. Nassif Hitti, former Foreign Minister of Lebanon

Mr. Nadim Houry, Executive Director Arab Reform Initiativ

Ms. Asma Khalifa, co-founder of Khalifa Ihler Institute

Dr. Rouzbeh Parsi, Head of MENA Program, Swedish Institute of International Affairs

Amb. Alexandra Rydmark, Ambassador of Sweden to Jordan (*ex officio*)

Mr. Magnus Schöltz, Senior Advisor at the Wallenberg Foundations AB

Baroness Simone Susskind, Belgian politician and human and women's rights advocate

Dr. Nathalie Tocci, Director of the Istituto Affari Internazionali/IAI



For more information see: [Advisory Committee - Sweden Abroad](#)