

Damascus declaration for early childhood care and education ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Under the auspices of Mrs. Asma al-Assad, the Regional Arab Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education was held in Damascus from 20th to 22nd of September.

The Conference issued on Wednesday the Damascus Declaration for Early Childhood Care and Education at the conclusion of the Conference's activity.

Deceleration is based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the document from the Convention's committee on the importance of early childhood, the recommendations of the World Conference on Education for All Jomtien, 1990, the goals of the World Conference on Education for All Dakar 2000, the goals of the 2nd Arab Action Plan on Childhood for 2004-2015, and the plan for developing education in the Arab world adopted by the Damascus Arab Summit in March 2008.

The Declaration affirms that there are advanced steps, projects and programs being carried out by most Arab countries in protecting and caring for early childhood due to the importance of this stage in building children mentally, culturally, physically and socially, and that caring for early childhood guarantees the nation's future and security.

It underlined the basic and most important challenges facing developing early childhood in the Arab region, most significant of which is that the concept of early childhood and related programs are still limited to the pre-school (kindergarten) stage and thus lack comprehensiveness in building the various.

Other problems include the low rate of children enrolled in kindergartens in the Arab world compared to other areas, the continuing hindrance of providing early childhood services due to circumstances affecting some Arab countries, lack of coordination among Arab countries in developing early childhood strategies and policies, lack of guidance programs aimed at parents, insufficiency of data and statistics related to early childhood, insufficiency of qualified educational staff for managing programs, insufficiency of services provided by the official sector, in addition to the continuing Israeli occupation of Arab lands in Palestine and the occupied Syrian Golan and the Israeli destructive practices that affect programs and services aimed at early childhood.

Based on this, the Declaration announced adopting a comprehensive concept of early childhood care and education that covers the human growth period from birth up to the early years of elementary school which connects the physical, emotional, intellectual and social development of children through the required care and education to support their growth.

The Declaration placed early childhood care and education at the heart of the approaches for development, calling for improving the status of early childhood in national strategies and increasing allocations for it in terms of human and material resources.

Based on this comprehensive vision, the Declaration adopted four bases for building a national framework for early childhood. The first basis is "beginning from the start" (from birth to three years) which involves improving services to reach all young children and their families and meet their requirements and aspirations.

The second basis is "new opportunities for discovery and learning" (from three to six years) which covers guaranteeing the participation of children in regular activities for two years before entering school.

The third basis is "schools prepared for children" (from six to eight years) which involves providing a school environment that appreciates and celebrates children, integrates children and facilitates transition from the family environment to the school environment.

The fourth basis is "national policies and work plans for early childhood from each country" which calls for establishing integrated, clean and applicable policies for developing early childhood through national strategic viewpoints and active work plans supported by budgets with strong coordination among relevant sectors.

The point requires giving early childhood a clear position in every sector and all national and regional policies and plans.

It voiced commitment to doubling and improving efforts to expand the levels of early childhood care and education in Arab countries, expressing desire to reach high levels by 2015 that make a marked change in the building of human resources.

The Declaration called on relevant international organizations to stand firmly and more actively against the illegal practices of the Israeli occupation against children in the occupied Arab lands which deny them their basic children rights of education, health and good life, demanding the implementation of UN relevant decisions.

It also welcomed the UNESCO Regional Bureau's initiative for forming an Arab workgroup on early childhood in cooperation with the Arab League and its organization in order to allow Arab countries to develop early childhood care and education plans and programs.

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[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/10/09/damascus-declaration-early-childhood-care-and-education> [2]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/international> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/child-development> [4]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/kindergarten> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/childrens-rights> [6]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/pre-school> [7] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/international-organizations>