

**Freedom of Expression
& Dialogue Handbook**

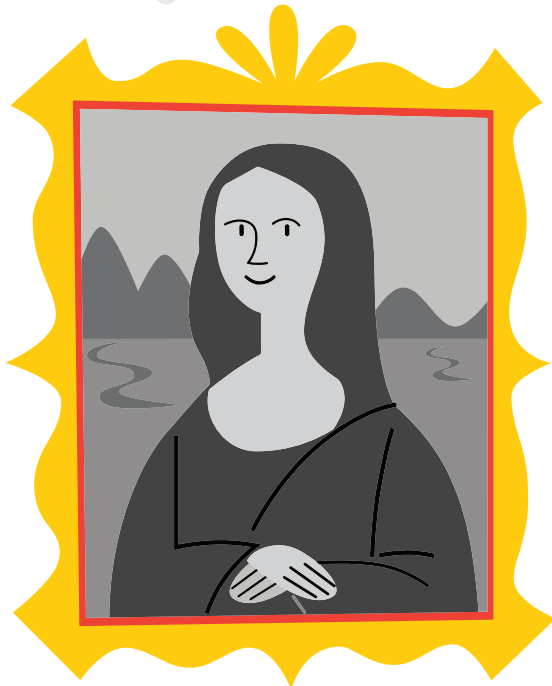


ABOUT MARCH

MARCH is a Lebanese non-profit, non-governmental organization working to promote social cohesion and personal freedoms while advocating for equal rights through its work in peace-building and conflict resolution. The journey of MARCH began with advocating for freedom of expression and intercommunal acceptance and respect among communities by promoting constructive dialogue to create sustainable reconciliation. MARCH aims to develop the resilience of marginalized youth and help them to build a better future while encouraging constructive dialogue and fostering cross-communal acceptance and respect to create sustainable reconciliation.

The Freedom of Expression program trains youth to discuss the thematic concepts of freedom of expression such as dialogue, censorship, and inclusive community building. Besides, the Training Of Trainers (TOT) program educated 22 youth to conduct on-ground awareness sessions in Tripoli.

You're in Lebanon,
and You decide to share
your independent opinion
about the culture and
traditions ...



This booklet was written and
designed by network members
who will use it to launch
awareness seminars in various
regions of Lebanon .



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ACTIVITY ONE: IDENTIFYING RED LINES

This activity aims to determine the relationship between freedom of expression and personal red lines by answering the question: everyone has their red lines, but to what extent do we have to respect them?

- 1** Give 5 papers to participants.
- 2** Ask participants to write all red lines they don't like to be criticized or talked about without explaining them or giving details about them. Give participants 10 mins.
- 3** Read aloud all the red lines of the participants' papers, and write them on the board for everyone to see.
- 4** Collective reflection on the meaning and impact of red lines down to the definition of freedom of expression.

WHAT ARE THE RED LINES?

Red lines are barriers set by individuals or groups that «the other» cannot override, nor criticize. They can be: religious and sectarian beliefs, traditional and cultural differences, economic and social status, family situation, nationality, and many other topics.

If we want to adhere to all red lines, we may create obstacles to freedom of expression to the point of eliminating all available topics by prioritizing people's feelings about these lines rather than free thinking.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Freedom of expression is:

Everyone's right to hold their own opinions and to express their views, ideas and beliefs;

Everyone's right to seek, receive and share information and ideas through different means;

Everyone's right to say what they want, whatever that is, without harming others or their reputation by lying.

WHAT IS FREEDOM OF THOUGHT?

An individual must seek access to real objective information from different quarters to enable them to form their own free thoughts and perspective and represent them.

SO WHAT ARE THE BASICS OF FREEDOM OF THOUGHT?

An idea based on logic and empirical observation takes place when the individual:

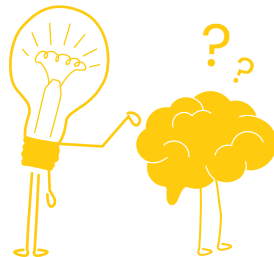
Is curious;

Looks for different information and different perspectives;

Does not abide by the influence of their environment;

Doesn't stick to an idea just because someone else told them to;

Is open to different opinions.



We express our thoughts through many ways that enhance our individuality, such as our



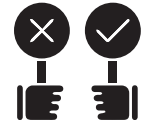
WRITING



LOOKS



SPEAKING



AND DEBATING.

THIS EXPRESSION CAN BE:

«Public»

We practice it on social media platforms and may address a large number of people indirectly.

«Private»

We practice it with friends or family and address a person or group directly,

Freedom of expression is an individual and societal responsibility and therefore we have to protect it even if other people's ideas are contrary to ours. It is our duty to abide by the regulations of freedom of expression so that it is best represented in society.

If you don't like what I'm saying, turn your deaf ear.



ACTIVITY TWO: VALUES OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

This activity aims to recognize the values of freedom of expression in our daily life practices.

1

Divide participants into 3 groups.

2

Give each group a set of photos representing different values with a large white paper.

3

Ask each group to present their ideas. Give every group 10 minutes.

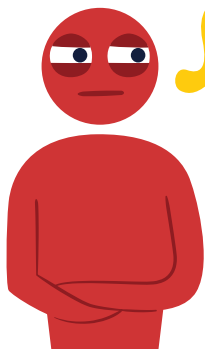
4

Collective reflection on the meaning and impact of red lines down to the definition of freedom of expression.

5

Identify through the group's answers the four necessary values that individuals need and that are indispensable for freedom of expression.

You can't talk if I don't like what you're saying.



CHARACTERISTICS AND VALUES OF EXPRESSING OPINION

Values are basic and fundamental beliefs that guide or motivate our attitudes and actions. They help determine what is important to us. Some values form the basis of an individual's decision to .adopt an opinion and express their ideas

There are 4 values to adopt when adopting an idea and expressing your opinion:



Curiosity: The search for new information is at the heart of freedom of expression. One must have a passion for learning and looking for different parts of the truth especially before adopting any idea.



Integrity: Freedom of expression is a social and individual responsibility, so one must be sincere in expressing opinion within the foundations of respect and morals, otherwise it will turn into hate speech or slander and defamation.



Humility: One must be humble in expressing opinion, admitting that no one knows everything and therefore may accept and hear a different opinion.



Courage: Ultimately, one must have the power to express their opinion regardless of the pressure or fear that they may face from their community.

Individuals are responsible for the information and ideas they share, and it is therefore necessary to embrace these values.

Without the values of curiosity, integrity, humility and courage, freedom of expression can be misled and abused.

Regulations of Freedom of Expression

My right of expression comes with certain regulations and standards that one has to pay attention to in order to avoid violating others' right or dignity or discriminating against them.

However, we need to note that these constraints are not personal in nature, so they do not entail hurting someone's feelings or using expressions that might bother them. The regulations in question include acts with the «intent» of provoking controversy between certain communities, or harming the dignity or honor of individuals. They are often bound by legal constraints.



Hate speech

is abusive or threatening speech or writing that expresses prejudice on the basis of ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or similar grounds. It stems from a strong and irrational sense of **hostility** towards a person or group of people because of their identity.

Sedition

is the conduct or speech **inciting** people to rebel or likely to cause a heated argument between people from different communities.



Smearing

is the **intent** of damaging the reputation of (someone) by false accusations.

Slander & Defamation

is an action in the **intent** of damaging the good reputation of another.

Hate speech, slander and defamation

are punishable in most countries in accordance with the Penal Code and fines which are imposed on the perpetrators.



LEGAL ASPECT OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION



Lebanon's Constitution stipulates that:

Lebanon is a Parliamentary Democratic Republic

Respect for public freedoms, foremost among which is freedom of opinion and belief

Respect for social justice and equal rights and duties of all citizens without distinction or preference

Article 8 of the Lebanese Constitution states:

- Personal freedom is safeguarded and protected by law
- No offense or penalty can be established except under the law
- No one can be arrested, detained, or incarcerated except in accordance with the provisions of the law
- Article 13 adds that the freedom to express an opinion in words and in writing is legally guaranteed.

In addition, Lebanon's Constitution adopts Lebanon's commitment to the League of Arab States, as well as to the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of the Bill of Human Rights. The freedom of the individual or group is thus upheld without restriction **except in cases of:**

- Respect for the rights or reputations of others
- Protection of national security and public order
- Protection of public health or morals

Freedom of expression remains limited by practices or dogmas that prevent the development of free thought or expression of opinion.



ACTIVITY THREE: ON CENSORSHIP - ROLE PLAYING

This activity aims to identify various practices of government censorship over artistic production such as plays and films.

1

Divide participants into 3 groups.

2

Ask each group to create text and scenes related to any subject they wish and give them some kind of artistic production (theatrical, film, documentary). You can give a list of topics to choose from. Give every group 15 mins.

3

Ask each group to present their ideas. Give every group 10 minutes.

4

From the answers, select parts in their texts and scenes that may be deleted through censorship in Lebanon and give reasons for deleting.

That being said, freedom of expression remains restricted, not directly by law, but by practices or dogmas that prevent the development of free thought or expression of opinion. What are these restrictions?

The importance of freedom of expression and freedom of opinion is in their support for accountability, oversight and combating corruption, a right enshrined in the Lebanese Constitution and international conventions.



Censorship



Self-censorship occurs when a person sets limits and barriers to their words, thoughts, and various personal expressions. In general, self-censorship can either be positive or negative depending on its context.



In its positive sense, a person watches and limits their words when they are aware that:

- They can affect the honor and dignity of a person or organization
- It would violate the law

In its negative sense, a person may observe and limit their words and thoughts because:

- They are not accepted by communities or persons such as parents, neighbors or friends
- They might be subjected to oral, psychological or physical damage as a repercussion.

That being said, censorship is not only exercised by the individual towards themselves, it can also be a powerful tool in the hands of governments and authorities to limit and guide freedom of expression.

Censorship by the State is the restriction of information within constraints and barriers determined by the State, thereby controlling what may be published, said or expressed in publications, the press, television programmes, artistic products and others.

However, Lebanon's censorship system has double standards.



Does Lebanon's censorship system actually protect the public interest and the individual?

It is alleged that the censorship system aims to protect public freedoms and promote a peaceful public environment, and that censorship of arts and culture is a necessary means of maintaining peace and morality.

However, some artistic productions are prevented from being published or even produced as preliminary censorship beyond the legal texts and constraints of Lebanon's preliminary censorship system.

Currently, Lebanon's General Security:

Performs censorship functions in an official capacity	Exercises preliminary censorship
Considers the views of the religious and sectarian authorities concerned, such as Dar Al Fatwa and the Catholic Media Office.	Exercises preliminary control over plays based on a 1977 legislative decree explicitly granting it the right to reject in full or partial approval a play without guidance or instructions.

The General Security can censor artistic productions based on 4 criteria:

- 1 Offending the public's sensitivities
- 2 Endangering the State
- 3 Offending public order and morality
- 4 Spreading propaganda against the State's interests

However, written laws are unclear and as such create inequality in their implementation. For example, taking into account all the country's sensitive topics, we end up producing no plays or films.

The importance of artistic production in societies is that it delivers difficult and sensitive conversations in a constructive way rather than creating extreme conversations and actions in acute situations.

Example:

The play «Will It Pass, or Not?» was censored by the General Security, and was forbidden to be showcased publicly after it had already been performed.

In a lengthy process, in order to test and expose the flaws and contradictions of the censorship process in Lebanon, MARCH, together with a team of artists, screenwriters and journalists, wrote and submitted a large number of texts to the Public Security Censorship Bureau.

These texts were based on heated discussions around controversial topics, news, or articles from local newspapers, or on texts that previously went through the censorship process with minor changes such as CHINN episodes, Jumana Haddad's controversial articles or other.

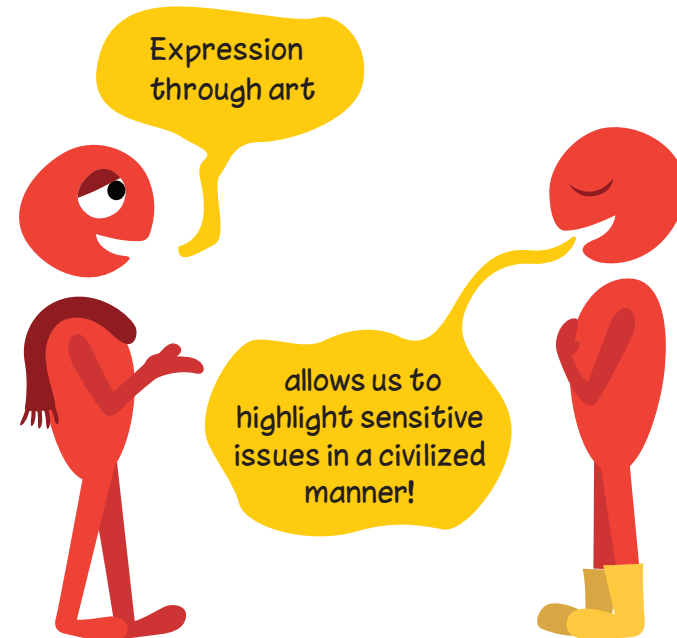
It was expected that the texts written by MARCH would not be authorized after they had been sent to the Censorship Bureau. Although some texts have been edited or banned, the vast majority had been approved.



TO CONCLUDE:

- Arbitrary censorship laws lead to oppression of Lebanon's arts and culture
- The legal texts of censorship are vague and are therefore analyzed in generalistic view
- Censorship extends to important issues such as holding government officials accountable and dealing with the memory of the civil war
- Censorship restricts free debate by silencing sensitive social issues

Lebanon's censorship system prohibits and restricts artistic production, which is the most important tool for peacebuilding and conflict resolution.



TOOLS TO PROMOTE FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION & CHALLENGE OPPRESSION



Freedom of expression takes many forms within religiously and ideologically diverse societies, which makes it difficult to protect.

Therefore, the first step to promoting freedom of expression is to enable a person to:

Have freedom of thought that represents their position on a specific subject

Look into different aspects of a particular topic from different sources

Conduct their personal analysis and link it to information they gathered and summarized

Therefore, the process of protection and preservation of the right to freedom of expression and freedom of opinion requires personal and individual efforts.

Promoting inclusive dialogue and pluralism

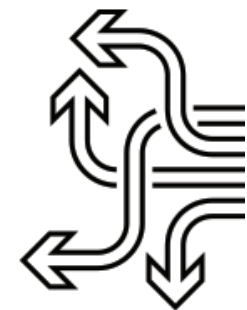
Encouraging and adhering to dialogue and discussion models

Encouraging debate

Then, everyone's diverse voices and opinions are respected and maintain their representation and presence in society.



Doesn't the world seem too boring to imagine that everyone looks the same?



Inclusive Dialogue:

Entails opening channels of communication between different communities through dialogue

Leads to acceptance of cultural diversity

Promotes social cohesion and a spirit of sharing cultural knowledge.

Inclusive Pluralism:

It is a diversity of views about a particular approach or idea

Creates new and multiple perspectives in people

Contributes to understanding different cultures and thus accepting others

Dialogue and inclusive pluralism can be achieved only with the freedom of expression that represents people, which is a prerequisite for opening dialogue, accepting different views, and maintaining interaction among all groups of society.



How can we practice these concepts and sustain them in our societies? Through the use of two basic tools to promote and ensure freedom of expression and freedom of opinion: dialogue and debate.

Dialogue is

a discussion process aimed at pursuing common understanding through effective and emotional listening.

There are several criteria for organizing a dialogue that can be summarized as follows:

The dialogue should contain all the requirements of equality and the opportunity to contribute equitably to opinions

The dialogue should start with the points of agreement not the points of difference to establish a common understanding base from which to initiate dialogue

There should be no sense of racial superiority, cultural superiority, or spirit of cultural dominance by any party

Listening is aimed at understanding

It should contain openness to all perspectives

Debate is

a detailed discussion based on methods and techniques that promote meaningful and inclusive dialogue.

In the debate, we turn the Byzantine argumentation into constructive and clear debates through the use of interconnected communication tools and techniques as well as the projection of serial ideas and arguments.

There are several criteria relating to the debate's organization process, which are summarized as follows:

1 Before taking any position or opinion on a particular topic, it is important to ask critical thinking questions

2 Understanding supportive and opposing perspectives on the subject:

Why do I support it?



Why do I oppose it?



3 Organizing of Information:

- Identifying the groups/ persons concerned: which groups or persons are concerned?
- Collecting information through research
- Summarizing information by selecting those that support or oppose your argument



As such, debating and dialogue are among the most important tools of freedom of expression because they include the basic qualities that debaters and interlocutors must have in an inclusive dialogue that protects and promotes freedom of expression.

Motivational Saying

«Everyone has the right to publish their various opinions without restrictions.»

Where?

In Lebanon

When?

The 21st Century

How?

Through Social Media:
Instagram, WhatsApp,
Facebook

Why?

Everyone has the right to publish news and opinions, express their thoughts freely and access information.

What is freedom of expression?

What is the right to access information?

Who has the right to express his opinion and access to information?

Who can prevent these rights? And for what reasons?

Government through laws and regulations?

Society through social pressure?

What rules and regulations restrict freedom of expression?





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www.marchlebanon.org