

AN ORPHAN'S WORDS FUEL A LAWYER'S PASSION

JORDAN ✧ HUMAN RIGHTS

In the summer of 2012, when Jordanian lawyer Rami Al Hashmi asked Laila,* a young orphan, why she repeatedly committed petty crimes, her answer stopped him in his tracks. Laila said, "I do them again and again to go back to prison where there is food and shelter."

Laila's desperate admission illustrates how discriminatory practices impact the lives of orphans and children who are either deemed illegitimate or born as a result of rape. Such practices included these children being assigned a special number on their national identity cards. Instantly recognizable to employers, schools and government agencies, the number underscored the children's instability and encouraged discrimination. As a then-volunteer with the National Center for Human Rights (NCHR), Rami had heard many stories from citizens in need of legal services, but the orphan's words echoed almost daily. They motivated him to work harder to help her and others in similar situations, leading him to join NCHR's ultimately successful campaign to end such practices.

This human rights work represents a shift in Rami's legal career. After graduating from the University of Jordan in 2008 and completing the required two-year training for attorneys, he worked in a bank's legal department. Soon, he opened a law office specializing in commercial and labor law. While Rami had always been interested in human rights, it had never been central to his work.

In June 2012, Rami heard that NCHR was hosting a two-day human

rights course for young lawyers. The ABA ROLI workshop was part of a larger program to build a comprehensive understanding of national and international human rights laws and their application among Jordanian legal professionals.

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"I want to raise awareness among my neighbors in southern Jordan," says Rami about his interest in human rights. Rami lives in Madaba, a town south of Jordan's capital city, where he believes the traditional mindsets that marginalize women and children are stronger than in Amman, and are exacerbated by fewer opportunities for building awareness and for equitable development.

Nineteen lawyers attended the workshop, which Rami describes as "a valuable opportunity [to learn about] human rights, trafficking in persons and labor issues." He commends the role-playing exercises that allowed him to practice receiving human rights complaints and arguing such cases before judges, along with delineating the roles of the public prosecutor, defense attorney and civil society institutions.

The experience inspired Rami to follow up on his interest in human rights. He began a three-month volunteer position at NCHR, soon finding that helping the indigent, such as Laila, was

more gratifying than his commercial law work. Thanks to the work of Rami and others at the center and the subsequent publicity about the plight of orphans, the Jordanian Royal Court intervened, and now citizens are able to ask

for national identity numbers that do not reveal their status.

Rami's contributions during this campaign impressed NCHR staff, and in September 2012 he began to work formally as a legal consultant on a project to help girls and women. Tracing his life-changing career shift to his participation in the ABA ROLI workshop, Rami says, "I hope that such courses will continue to be held because they are needed so that citizens can understand their own rights and defend the rights of others." ✧



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