

National Charter for Education on Living Together in Lebanon

In the framework of inclusive citizenship
embracing religious diversity



Cover picture: Mural realized by the Alwan Club members in
Hussein Massoud Public High School - Bshamoun

Preamble

Cultural and religious diversity in Lebanon is one of the main characteristics of Lebanon's social fabric, and a factor forming a common national identity. Religious belonging also plays an important role in shaping the Lebanese citizen's personality, ideas and behavior, and affecting the relationships between individuals as well as the activities they undertake in public life. The Lebanese Constitution stipulates the respect of this spiritual dimension of life and of religious diversity through guaranteeing the freedom of belief on the one hand, and ensuring the State's respect of God and all religions and rites on the other¹. Therefore, the constitution declares that no authority that is contradictory, in its nature and implementation, with the principles of the Pact of coexistence², shall be legitimate.

The constitution thus considered religious diversity as a main component for the establishment of the Lebanese social contract, and guaranteed the freedom of expressing this diversity on the religious and educational levels. The constitution made of this enriching diversity and the interaction between its components a part of the common national culture (people's experience in coexistence, partnership in managing public matters, official religious holidays, common values, heritage and touristic religious sites...). This reality instituted Lebanon as a model country when it comes to establishing the national entity and the unifying culture on the basis of unity within diversity and the will to coexist.

This national reality is in harmony with international pacts, since the International Declaration of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on Cultural Diversity considers that cultural diversity is a source of exchange, renovation and invention, and its presence is necessary for the human race, as biological diversity is for living species. Therefore the declaration pays tribute to policies that encourage promoting social solidarity and peace through guaranteeing the participation of all citizens regardless of their backgrounds and the interaction among them through the dynamism of a civil society embracing this diversity³. The UNESCO International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century declared in its report that education should be a continuous process for a main objective is achieving the mastery in the coexistence principles and establishing relations with different individuals and groups⁴.

The International Declaration of Human Rights also emphasizes in article 26, addressing the right to education for all, the comprehensive message of education targeting

¹ The Lebanese Constitution, Article 9

² The Lebanese Constitution, Introduction

³ UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001), Articles 1 and 2

⁴ "Learning: the Treasure Within", Report of the UNESCO International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, UNESCO Publications, 1996

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the global development of the human being's personality and the promotion of rights and freedoms, in addition to mutual understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and ethnical and religious groups⁵.

The education on Living Together in Lebanon is therefore a natural and necessary response to constitutional rules establishing the national entity, in harmony with international pacts and spiritual values promoting human development and human civilization. It also empowers young generations to live in a context of globalization and of the increasing interaction between people and cultures. This education also constitutes an important strategic objective for dealing with the results of the latest internal conflicts and wars that seriously affected the Lebanese society and its social cohesion, and individuals as well as their trust in the nation and in each other. The Lebanese society is in fact suffering from a memory charged with images of confessional violence and an increasing segregation based on confessional belonging, in addition to the dissemination of false convictions and stereotypes of the other citizen of a different religion. The exploitation of the religious feeling leads to political mobilization and to promoting sectarian communitarian mentalities. This leads to community impulse at the expense of a citizenship based on partnership between citizens and on common public life values. Some wrong ideas attributed to religion lead to the deviation of the religious belonging concept tending towards extremism and severity therefore disfiguring the message of divine religions calling for peace, justice, serving the nation and solidarity among citizens.

Based on the above, the importance of education on coexistence becomes clear, not only for generalizing religious culture from one side, or the approach of education on citizenship from an individual and legal perspective detached from the Lebanese reality on the other side. Education requires building the youth's capacity to manage religious diversity and understand it in light of the Lebanese special context as part of a common national heritage, including all the aspects promoting the feeling of belonging to a common national entity. Education on coexistence is based on developing citizenship values embracing this cultural and religious diversity, and highlighting its spiritual sources and comprehensive humanitarian dimensions, so that it becomes an obstacle facing sectarian ideologies and caste impulses.

This approach of education on living together, in the framework of a citizenship embracing religious diversity, is compatible with the Education Sector Development Plan ratified by the Council of Ministers in 1994, and with what has been adopted by the educational curricula issued in decree number 10227 of 8/5/1997 that highlighted the development of the following characteristics of a citizen:

- Having a spiritual heritage emanating from divine religions and respecting human ethics and values
- Conscious of his common national history, refusing partition to reach a unified and open society from a humanitarian perspective

⁵ International Declaration of Human Rights (1984), Article 26

- Upholding the public interest and abiding by the laws, in harmony with the Coexistence Pact
- Working on consolidating the spirit of peace in one's self and in one's relations with others and at the national social relations level.

Since all the relevant parties, including students, their parents, and teachers as well as trainers, directors, policy makers and developers of educational curricula in the private and public sectors and within the civil society institutions, agreed upon a common approach for this important cause, which is needed in order to achieve the desired targets, this National Charter for Education on Living together in the framework of inclusive citizenship embracing religious diversity came to express the common will of these partners to face this challenge and assume this public responsibility. The Charter thus offers a conceptual framework and a set of policies and mechanisms guaranteeing the set objectives in a harmonious and effective manner.

Chapter One

Main Concepts and General Principles

Article one: The Lebanese civilization model

Lebanon is a civilization project model and a message to the world due to its ability to recognize, respect and preserve the cultural specificities of spiritual groups forming its social fabric while stressing on national unity and social cohesion on the other side, as a common space of interaction, harmony and collaboration among citizens of different backgrounds, on the basis of equality in rights and obligations and the respect of laws and the general common values.

Article two: Inclusive citizenship instead of fusion and sectarianism

The inclusive citizenship embracing religious diversity in Lebanon can only be achieved through the liberation from the risks of fusion or sectarianism. The concept of fusion in its global meaning refers to achieving unity through the fusion of all elements in one body, which deprives the society from the richness of diversity and makes the citizen feel that a major part of his individual and collective identity is not recognized. The closed sectarian ideology, on the other hand, imprisons the citizens in impulses and deprives them of a scope of partnership and responsibility based on common national principles. A sound citizenship approach shall therefore be based on perceiving the religious and cultural diversity in Lebanon as part of the national identity and the common general culture on one side, and on the other side on considering citizenship as the common vital area where the national identity and the participation of citizens to the public life can be translated.

Article three: Education on Coexistence

The effective and responsible citizenship requires the development of an educational program embracing the cultural and religious diversity forming the Lebanese society, where the sectarian identities do not overshadow the national belonging of students. On the contrary, citizenship education allows the student to be capable of embracing his cultural specificity and others' specificities, and thus will work on discovering and respecting them as part of his national culture. This approach promotes social cohesion and develops the civil society dynamism and consolidates civil peace through facilitating the inter-communitarian social and cultural interactions, and ensuring the growth of creative abilities and their dissemination on the national level. Education on coexistence hence favors the creation of a society characterized by safety, openness, cooperation and partnership between all citizens.

Article four: School is a safe space for communication and unity

Educational institutions in Lebanon have a main contribution in building national culture and civil peace since they represent a safe place where students can experiment diversity and develop relations among youth in addition to elaborating their objective dialogue capacities and respecting others and different opinions, apart from sectarian, party and categorical outbids. School can therefore represent a model of the desired society, transforming education on living together in the context of inclusive citizenship embracing religious diversity into an intrinsic part of its educational and value project.

Article five: The culture of religious diversity in public life

This approach is based on developing educational programs and curricula in a way that presents religious diversity in the Lebanese context as a natural part of the public life. Education deals with the historical, cultural, social and spiritual aspects of this diversity on the basis of a positive and objective approach. Education on religious pluralism thus insures perceiving the other as he perceives himself, promotes mutual understanding and the feeling of security in the context of inter-religious relations which leads to overcoming ignorance that is a reason for precaution and enmity. This approach is based on understanding and respecting the specificities and shedding the light on common values that promote the importance of partnership in national and social responsibility. Therefore, the student will become more conscious of the public life values and its common religious and human basis, and will therefore be more willing to commit to it.

Article six: Educational competencies approach to deal with differences

Developing the educational curricula according to the competency-based approach aims at empowering the student to use the knowledge he acquired in school in his daily life and to develop his social practices. This is why this approach of education on coexistence exceeds developing the student's knowledge of religious diversity as a knowledge phenomenon independent from reality and from the student's behavior and personality. This approach requires instead the adoption of religious diversity as a factor facilitating the achievement of the general objectives of the national curriculum through a transversal integration in the programs and courses. This requires the development of a comprehensive educational project that contributes in liberating the students' mentalities from sectarianism and empowering them to positively deal with differences, to solve conflicts in a peaceful manner and to understand diversity as a vital part of their national identity that they are proud of.

Article seven: The student, an actor of social change

The competency-based approach considers the student as the center of the educational process, and gives a special importance to daily life situations instead of isolating the knowledge content from its realistic backgrounds. The education on coexistence and inclusive citizenship thus ought to tackle the experiences and problematic lived by the students and to ensure their acquisition of adequate skills not only to understand and analyze

this reality but also to have a positive impact on its course. Therefore, the student becomes a factor of change in his environment whether at home or in the society. This approach thus encourages students to participate to the public life and establishes the basis of conscious and responsible citizenship practices.

Article eight: Education on dialogue and through dialogue

Dialogue with the other and inter-cultural and inter-religious communication shall not only become the components of education on coexistence but shall also be one of the main means of achieving this education. Education on living together in the framework of inclusive citizenship embracing religious diversity is in fact an education on dialogue, through dialogue; the positive diversity management is, then, the target as well as the mean of the educational process. This requires finding the suitable educational situations allowing students to practice dialogue and inter-sectarian common activities, whether their school environment is mixed or not. The culture of inclusive citizenship embracing diversity would be generated based on a realistic experience of coexistence and the building of a purposeful social partnership, free of clashes.

Article nine: A development project for the whole school community

The school is not separate from its social environment and is affected by its reality. Students, teachers and administration employees carry the ideas of this environment and its logical and sentimental positions. Therefore, the school's educational project shall take into consideration the problematic linked to the local and national context and the impact of media and modern communication technologies on attitudes and mentalities. The educational process shall also ensure a space for analyzing current ideas and trends and reviewing them on the basis of the principles and values of coexistence. This requires communication with students' parents and engaging them in the adoption of the educational project in addition to empowering them to play a role in its achievement, as well as cooperating with the civil society organizations working in this field and with the different media companies. Education on coexistence thus becomes a factor of awareness, continuous transformation and development of the whole school community.

Article ten: The key role of teachers

Education on coexistence requires the commitment of the whole school community in order to achieve it, especially teachers, regardless of their specializations and their educational responsibilities. The teacher has the main impact on the students through being a role model, transferring values to them, and promoting the skills related to the desired competencies in building the student's personality as per the main objectives of the educational system. Therefore, all teachers shall be continuously empowered and trained in order to effectively implement their mission in harmony with the concept of inclusive citizenship embracing religious diversity.

Article eleven: Role of religious education in the promotion of coexistence

Education on coexistence is different from religious education, they are however complementary when education on coexistence promotes the respect of a diversified spiritual heritage, and highlights its important status in public life. At the same time, religious education consolidates coexistence when it stresses on the religious call to respect the other and his beliefs and traditions, and promotes openness and social solidarity. It also achieves this objective through focusing on the promotion of public values and behaviors, and overcoming isolation within the religious identity. Religious education can also prove to students the harmony between the citizenship and coexistence values and the spiritual teachings, and call to adopt these values.

Article twelve: Cooperation between the civil society and the public and private sectors

Education on coexistence requires a continuous cooperation and a sustainable partnership between the public and private sectors and with the civil society that represents an experimental field for the educational results through as it allows students to practice and implement its outputs. The private sector participates to achieving the objectives of the education on coexistence through adopting this educational approach and implementing its programs in complementarily with the specificity of its religious and secular institutions.

Article thirteen: The National Charter and sustainable development

This Charter represents the national context guiding and managing education for coexistence and determining its success parameters. It is one of the main references for the development of educational programs and curricula in this regard. It also represents an incentive for educational institutions to develop their adoption of the concept of inclusive citizenship embracing religious diversity in all its educational backgrounds, as well as on the policies and practices levels, in harmony with their cultural and demographic specificities. This Charter also requires a strong commitment and cooperation and the concretization of the intentions by educational officials, politicians and decision makers. It also requires a follow-up of the implementation, evaluation and sustainable development and patience and forbearance in working for the desired results.

Chapter two

Educational policies

Article 14: Projected educational objectives

Education on Living Together aims at forming a citizen who is:

- Committed to citizenship values that embrace diversity, encompass more than the school environment, help overcoming sectarian mentalities and narrow fanaticism, and promote the individual's belonging to a unifying national entity.
- Capable of objectively approaching religious diversity, understanding and respecting every religion's specificity, and aware of the common spiritual and ethical grounds that strengthen the shared social and national responsibility.
- Working through their acquired educational skills on adopting values and attitudes in favor of diversity and contributing to the promotion of social coherence and positive change within the society.
- Having critical mind and capable of responsibly dealing with any conflict related to religious slogans, turning it into an opportunity to raise awareness on the risks of exploiting religion in the political discourse and conflicts as well as on the consequences of fanaticism and discrimination.
- Proud of their adherence to a national cross communitarian network.

Article 15: Progressive and holistic growth

Education on living-together is based on a cumulative educational policy building a pupil's personality according to four complementary dimensions: human, citizen, believer and activist.

Primary education:

- A) The first cycle of the primary education focuses on Humanity and the belonging to the Human family where we all beings are equal in dignity, leading to the growth of the sense of solidarity with every human being and rejection of all kinds of fanaticism and discrimination.
- B) The second cycle stresses on Citizenship, public life values, loving the country, respecting the public sphere and discovering ones rights and duties as citizen.
- C) The third cycle moves to accepting differences and looking at religious diversity as enriching the national culture. Hence, the aim of this cycle is to discover this diversity and to promote cross religious exchange and communication with a special focus on

faith in common values, openness and refusal of any radicalism and religious or sectarian seclusion.

Secondary education:

- D) The secondary cycle (fourth cycle) focuses on discovering religious diversity in its global and cultural dimensions, with all the problematic about clash and dialogue it may comprise. Consequently, pupils draw a realistic image of religious diversity based on an independent judgment as well as on a self criticism capacity, away of any stereotypes. Furthermore, they are oriented towards a peaceful resolution of conflicts, acquire the civil service spirit and start assuming their responsibility in enhancing peace, justice and the image of Lebanon as a model of coexistence.

Focusing on one of the four previously mentioned dimensions (Human / citizen / believer / activist) based on the four education cycles should not lead to assigning one dimension for each cycle. It rather requires a transversal approach of all of these dimensions based on their relation to education on living-together in the framework of inclusive citizenship, with various backgrounds starting by humanity, then citizenship, arriving to religious diversity, commitment to mutual relationships and finally conservation of social coherence and peace building.

Article 16: Citizenship as the basis of education on living together

The Charter stresses on the fact that citizenship is the most suitable framework to embrace and appreciate diversity and to enhance the culture of living together. Hence, education on living together would start from promoting the national belonging, loving the country, respecting its symbols (the Lebanese flag, anthem...), being proud of our national identity, trusting governmental institutions, serving the public interest and respecting the public sphere. In this natural context, individuals would grow, discovering their individual and general citizenship's dimensions (rights, freedoms, contribution to the civil society and the public life), and would get the opportunity to be open and adapt to cultural and religious diversity composing their society. This approach of citizenship generates a new mentality of solidarity and common vision of the future and public interest.

Article 17: Positive vision of diversity as a cultural reality

Education on Living Together views religious diversity as a reality based phenomenon as well as one of the components of the general national culture. Therefore, it aims at converting pupils' fear and refusal of different religious affiliations into adaptation to diversity that shall be seen as an opportunity for mutual enrichment. This process requires an objective knowledge of the multiple religions and confessions, as well as of each religion's traditions, in line with how the believers themselves would introduce their own religion. This objective knowledge shall be acquired through constructive dialogue, amicable and honest relationships among pupils from various religious affiliations.

Article 18: Focusing on the common values

Religions cannot be simply defined as systems of convictions and rites, but convey a message marking our lives with a special vision; they lead a believer's attitude towards good through their reserve of spiritual values and meanings. Hence, the stress shall be put on the common values so that religious affiliations wouldn't be limited to a societal collective identity; pupils from different religious backgrounds will then discover that they share a common path: that of seeking goodness, and reforming oneself and the society according to a number of common values.

Article 19: Teaching the values of inclusive citizenship embracing diversity

The culture of living together is associated to a group of common values with spiritual and human dimensions; hence, we are called upon to spread and enhance these values throughout the school years so that they become rooted in the pupils' minds and consequently guide their behavior whether when they reach university levels or in their professional and national life. Teachers and parents shall also adopt these values and put them into practice. Among these values: respect the human dignity and life, refuse all kinds of discrimination, be open to others and accept differences, respect sacred places and symbols, promote peace with oneself and others, enhance justice and honesty and reject double standards, in addition to integrity, solidarity, service, charity and mercy.

Article 20: Building capacities for dialogue and coexistence

Education on Living Together requires giving a special importance to some capacity building skills for communication, dialogue and learning from differences. Among the first skills to be enhanced: listening and respecting others' opinions, flexibility enabling to understand others' in their special contexts and avoid unjustified prejudice, modesty and readiness to accept others' judicious thoughts, internal openness allowing mutual understanding, acknowledgement of the bond with others, solidarity and human compassion to support others' righteous causes.

Article 21: Enhancing objectivity and intellectual freedom

The religious diversity approach in the framework of citizenship and coexistence education requires training pupils on staying away from generalization, stereotypes and prejudice and avoiding radicalism in order to tackle the related issues moderately and objectively. Therefore, this approach aims at giving pupils intellectual independence and encouraging them to freely express their opinions as well as developing their analysis and objective criticism potential, moving them out of the sectarian assessment of events and positions to a more objective vision, to positions protecting them from radicalism and enabling them to preserve the common interest and public good.

Article 22: Freeing the memory and learning from History

Education on Living Together cannot ignore or neglect past tragedies that often put Lebanese, from different religions or even within the same religion, in a state of violent and destructive conflict. A memory marked by violence and still bleeding generates turmoil and apprehension and weakens trust in co-citizens who are often wrongly accused of causing these sufferings, just because they belong to that same sect. Education on Living Together requires a methodical revision of history, in its positive and negative aspects, in order to draw lessons from it and free oneself from its impact on the present. This entails accepting that every side had its own past circumstances and version of the occurring events that should be read in the light of a common vision for the future as well as a conviction that legitimate objectives can only be achieved through democratic political practice and not taken by force.

Article 23: Openness to diversity in all school contexts

The rate of cross religious mixture in Lebanese schools varies according to the school's demographic environment or the general policy in the private educational institutions. Some schools directly benefit from religious and confessional diversity of the teaching body and pupils to experiment coexistence and mutual enrichment within the school environment. Other schools gather a religiously homogenous group of teachers and pupils. In both cases, education on coexistence requires the adoption and implementation of educational policies associated to openness to cultural and religious diversity according to the mechanisms presented by this Charter.

Article 24: Complementary formal and non-formal education and focus on extracurricular activities

Objectives of the competency-based approach to comprehensive education on Living Together can be achieved through the integration in the formal education system of non-formal education approaches as well as extracurricular activities offering the pupils the opportunity to learn through practice and acquire the necessary skills through experience and interaction with peers within motivating and favorable contexts.

Article 25: Partnership with the media

Education on Living Together ought to use the media and modern communication tools (Websites and social media channels) either through the production and promotion of educational material, by launching special educational channels and websites, or through partnerships with media institutions that can contribute to the realization of this National Charter's objectives.

Article 26: Commitment to the national program of education on Living Together

The success of this national educational plan requires its effective adoption by all educational institutions. This commitment starts with the elaboration of the school's educational project associated to this concept, then its adoption as a reference for the educational action and implementation in programs and activities. It requires as well the strong willingness of all private and public schools to implement the developed programs and use the textbooks published by the Centre for Educational Research and Development, exclusively and in all the educational cycles.

Chapter three

Suggested mechanisms

The previously mentioned concepts, principles and policies guide the stakeholders concerned with education on Living Together towards elaborating the adequate strategies in order to reach the projected objectives; they define the common national horizon for such actions and draw the potential fields of cooperation, development and creative initiatives on various levels and by all parties.

The below is a non-exhaustive list of suggested mechanisms that shall serve the objectives of this educational project under the current circumstances and that should be regularly assessed and developed.

Article 27: The general school framework

- a) Establish twinning programs between schools from different regions and religious environments.
- b) Mention the official religious holidays with their explanation in the school agenda.
- c) Suspend classes on all official holidays and celebrate Christian and Muslim religious holidays.
- d) Profit from the main spiritual occasions (Ramadan, Christmas...) to help the students, the school staff and its social environment to deeply understand these occasions and express their solidarity with others, respecting their religious traditions and sharing their spiritual and social meanings (common Iftars, Christmas decoration...).

Article 28: Extracurricular activities

- a) Establish school clubs for education on Living Together, similar to the “Alwan” clubs.
- b) Organize visits to various religious sites that constitute an opportunity for socialization with others and discovering the national heritage and cultural characteristics of religious communities.
- c) Organize mutual visits among schools including students, teachers and parents.
- d) Organize social awareness activities on education on coexistence and religious diversity with the contribution of the students, which target the school and its general environment.
- e) Arrange common activities between students and parents as well as specific activities for parents on citizenship and coexistence.

Article 29: General activities

- a) Cooperation with the civil society organizations to set out social voluntary activities gathering students from various private and public schools, through which they commonly serve the society.
- b) Elaborate general national programs on Living Together, such as competitions, student festivals and camps.

Article 30: The students

- a) Train the students on voluntary activities and civil service as well as on assisting others based on their needs without any consideration for their religious affiliations. Their capacities shall be built and they should be encouraged to take initiatives and decisions and assume their responsibilities.
- c) Benefit from religious diversity among students as a source of enrichment, making sure not to marginalize students belonging to a religious minority in the general school environment.

Article 31: Educational programs

- a) Benefit from the development of educational programs and curricula by the Centre for Educational Research and Development in order to integrate the concept of Education on Living Together as suggested by this Charter.
- b) Adopt a unified program for education on religious pluralism and common values.
- c) Include the concept of education on coexistence within the subjects focused on innovation and creativity such as painting, music, and theater...
- d) Add practicality to sociology class and associate it with volunteering and civil service.
- e) Include some religious texts calling for peace, human solidarity and tolerance in adequate literature subjects.
- f) Evoke the experiences of various religious figures and their initiatives in the field of the culture of dialogue, reconciliation and peacebuilding within the adequate educational classes.
- g) Use literary texts related to the religious celebrations and occasions and their meanings during the Arabic literature classes.

Article 32: The resources

- a) Equip school libraries with the adequate resources, whether books or movies.
- b) Ensure continuous support to schools by equipping them with the available resources and by building partnerships with local authorities and institutions (municipalities...) as well as with civil society organizations and donors whether national or international.
- c) Establish an observatory to follow up the change in students' behavior regarding coexistence, in order to encourage related academic and field studies and benefit from their results.

- d) Set up a public website to spread electronic resources and details about school activities and interaction in addition to social media channels.

Article 33: Teachers and educational process supervisors

- a) Organize training sessions for all teachers and administrative employees in both the private and public sector, enabling them to comfortably tackle diversity and religious issues as well as to develop their capacities to deal with fanaticism and religion-based discords.
- b) Train specialized teachers to teach the subjects related to religious diversity and who are able to lead related extracurricular activities.
- c) Include courses on education on inclusive citizenship embracing religious diversity in the programs of faculties of education and teachers' institutes.
- d) Set up a sustainable framework for vocational training to build the capacities of education professionals and follow up their needs.

**The National Charter for Education on
Living Together in Lebanon
was ratified on March 15, 2013**

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Lebanese Foundation for Interreligious Studies and Spiritual Solidarity

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