Background

In the context of UNESCO’s Ethics Education Programme, a Regional Expert Meeting on Ethics Teaching was held from 27 to 28 November 2006 in Muscat organized by the Oman National Commission for UNESCO and the Division of Ethics of Science and Technology of UNESCO. In the past, similar regional expert meetings were organized by UNESCO in Budapest, Moscow, Split and Tehran but this is the very first meeting held in the Arab region. About 20 experts of teaching ethics from Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates participated in the meeting.

The objectives of the meeting were firstly to exchange information on the current state of teaching ethics programmes in Arab countries, secondly to receive information on the programmes to be stored in the database of UNESCO (Global Ethics Observatory), thirdly to create a network of experts in the region for future cooperation in the field of teaching ethics and lastly, to plan for future action to further develop ethics teaching programmes in the region involving other countries that did not participated in the meeting this time.

1st day of the meeting (Monday 27 November)

UNESCO and ethics teaching
Following the welcome and opening addresses, Dr Henk ten Have, Director of the Division of Ethics of Science and Technology of UNESCO gave his presentation on the UNESCO’s activities concerning ethics teachings programmes. Dr ten Have explained that UNESCO started ethics education projects two years ago based on the three significant international instruments adopted by the Member States of UNESCO namely, the “Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights (1997), the “International Declaration on Human Genetic Data (2003) and the “Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights (2005)”.

The Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights contains a number of principles in the field of bioethics such as autonomy, consent, respect for human vulnerability, benefit sharing, social responsibility and so on. The fact that this declaration was adopted by all the Member States of UNESCO unanimously and by acclamation (in October 2005) shows that the Member States of UNESCO recognize the significance of ethical issues emerging in the field of life sciences and committed themselves to tackle with these issues. The major challenge after the adoption of the declaration is to take action to implement principles laid out in this declaration. The declaration itself has anticipated the follow-up actions and in its Article 23, the importance to promote bioethics education, training and information is mentioned.

In the field of Ethics of Science and Technology in general, the World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology of UNESCO (COMEST) produced a report on the teaching of ethics in December 2003. This report also formulates UNESCO’s plan of action in this field.
The Ethics Education Programme of UNESCO has currently four activities. First, through the Global Ethics Observatory (GEObs), information on experts, institutions, teaching programs and legislation in the field of bioethics and ethics of science and technology is collected and presented in the UNESCO’s databases. Second, UNESCO has established a committee of experts to elaborate a core curriculum of bioethics, which can be accessed free of charge and can be used to launch bioethics courses in the institutions and universities. The UNESCO curriculum of bioethics will be finalized early 2007 and will be pilot tested in several countries. Third, UNESCO is now developing courses on how to teach ethics. Targeting a young generation of teachers affiliated with Universities, UNESCO provides a one-week course of teaching ethics. The first session was provided in Romania in the end of October 2006. Fourth, UNESCO provides various resources to be used for promoting bioethics education at different levels. All publications are available free of charge in print and PDF versions. Information on UNESCO’s activities in the field of bioethics and ethics of science and technology, GEObs and publications are available at the following website: http://www.unesco.org/shs/ethics.

Question-and-answer

Q: Why has UNESCO started bioethics activities in the Eastern European region first?

A: The objective of UNESCO is to promote capacity building in each country and each region. Bioethics education needs to be established based on cultural and religious backgrounds. In this sense, Eastern European countries provide an interesting model of reconstructing a health care system, bioethics research and education after the collapse of communist regimes. There has been limited networking among ethics experts in the region and in fact ethics teaching has to be re-established in a completely new social and cultural environment. The experiences in this region can be a good reference to the Member States that are seeking ways to establish bioethics education.

Q: How can we receive more information on UNESCO’s activities? Who is the counterpart of UNESCO in each country or region?

A: There are National Commissions for UNESCO in each Member State and some of them are extremely active. In the Arab region, UNESCO has national offices and cluster offices in several countries with the regional office in Cairo for the ethics programme.

Q: How many UNESCO chairs do you have for the moment? What are their roles?

A: We have five UNESCO chairs on bioethics. They can be involved in UNESCO’s activities or can help to implement the programmes. However, the initiative to establish a UNESCO chair should come from the Universities and the governments. Sometimes we support their establishment by providing seed money. The problem often arises when they do not receive enough support to continue the chair. When they are supported by the Universities and the governments, they can be very active like chairs in Brasilia and Haifa.

Q: If you develop ethics teaching programmes at universities, the same programme cannot be applied in many different countries. How do you deal with different norms and needs in particular regions?

A: That is a major challenge we are facing now. Although it is important to address the specific needs of regions and countries, and to take into account the various ethical traditions, we currently have a common basis to work on bioethical principles since the Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights has been adopted by all Member States. This implies that there is a set of
fundamental principles that apply in different regions and different contexts. At the same time, practical applications are only possible if the specific conditions and circumstances are taken into account, following the famous dictum: “Think globally, act locally”. Developing regionally specific programmes is not only in the interest of regions but also the concern of the international community.

The importance of Ethics Teaching

Following the presentation of Dr ten Have, Dr Abdallah Daar of University of Toronto and Sultan Qaboos University in Muscat gave his presentation on the importance of ethics scholarship at the global level.

He emphasized that ethics scholars have a huge responsibility in today’s world. Along the rapid progress in science and technology, critical thinking is becoming indispensable since there is a link between the quality of research and ethical reflection. Departing from doctor-patient relationships, the scope of ethics is broadening at the global level. The concept of global health ethics is emerging which requires the empathy throughout the distance. It is to recognize that problems occurring in one country affect other countries so that helping other countries also helps ourselves.

Dr Daar then pointed out that the importance of producing scientific knowledge is more and more recognized in many countries including developing countries like China and India. He made a reference to the recently published UNESCO’s report on Knowledge Societies and emphasized that we are in the era that knowledge is considered as power for development. The role of academies of science is significant for providing information on policy making. Another aspect of the development of science and technology is that science projects are getting bigger involving global scale research such as the human genome project. There is a huge increase of research projects that involve human subjects in developing countries. The collaboration among various partners such as north-south, south-south, academic-industry and public-private partnerships are emerging which also shows the importance of global approaches to ethics and the role of international organizations like UNESCO is crucial.

Dr Daar moved to Canada six years ago and the major difference he observed with the Universities in this region is that in Canada, the research projects are largely supported and funded by the University. Projects need to be evaluated regularly especially the weaknesses should be reported openly so that they can receive adequate support to strengthen the projects. Then he listed a number of points to be considered in developing scholarly work e.g. balancing theoretical and empirical approaches, aiming more at policy impact and promoting interdisciplinarity involving philosophers, ethicists, lawyers, social scientists, biomedical scientists and physicians.

Question-and-answer

Q: It is not easy to make policy makers understand the importance of producing scientific knowledge rather than just purchasing it. How can we influence the policy makers? In realistic terms, it is not likely that we can expect to meet some change in a short period. How about if they say that the country is too poor to support research?

A: We need to inform policy makers and argue that if we do not produce knowledge, we will be left behind. It is not that poor countries do not invest in research but the recognition of the importance changes the policy. South-Korea is the good example of that. We need to think in a long-term
strategy. Of course we cannot force the policy makers to change their mind. Nevertheless, we can make them understand and listen to us by carrying out serious scholarly work.

ALECSO and ethics education

In the afternoon of 27 November, presentations by the representative of ALECSO, experts from Jordan and Saudi Arabia were given.

Mrs Saida Charfeddine, representative of Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) made a presentation on ALECSO’s mission and the cooperation with UNESCO. Situating its Head Quarter in Tunis, members of ALECSO meet regularly and work on the enforcement of the cooperation in Arab states. ALECSO is working closely with UNESCO in various fields such as education, culture, science, communication and information. In the field of bioethics, ALECSO provided a position paper of Arab states during the elaboration and deliberation of the draft declaration of bioethics and human rights. She commended the work of the expert committee of UNESCO to establish a model programme of ethics teaching and mentioned that ALECSO is also working intensively in this field. She also mentioned that she would report the result of this meeting to the General Conference of ALECSO which would be held soon in December 2006.

Ethics Teaching in Oman

Following the presentation of Mrs Charfeddine, Dr Harith Ghassany, Sultan Qaboos University of Oman talked about medical ethics programmes targeting medical students in his university. The medical ethics programme in Sultan Qaboos University started in the early 1990s and it has about 60 medical students. It is an optional course and there is no credit for taking the course. There is a gap between medical professionals who are everyday dealing with patients and medical students in regard to what they think the important ethical issues are. Therefore one of the objectives of the course is to have a balance between theory and practice by introducing issues that medical professionals are facing everyday including the issue of best communication with cancer patients, HIV/AIDS positive patients, gender identity disorder, female circumcision, and so on. The course is also aiming to sensitize students to new achievements in medicine and the ethical issues involved in them such as the human genome project.

The attendance of students at the course is a problem since it is not mandatory. In order to encourage students to attend the class, Dr Ghassany mentioned efforts to stimulate students by inviting eminent guests from outside the University and by providing publications. In Oman, the national research council was recently established and in the future, collaboration with the council on medical ethics is foreseen.

Dr Ghassany also pointed out several issues to be considered in teaching medical ethics. One of the issues he raised was Islamic teaching and medical ethics. The role of religion is significant in ethics teaching however, in the particular context of medicine and ethics, it is not evident that a better Islamic practitioner is a better medical ethics practitioner. Another question is whether the course needs to be taught in English or Arabic. Dr Ghassany thinks that English is more suitable in critical reflection and exchange of thought than Arabic language which does not promote individualization. He also mentioned that students should develop a critical eye on scientific development. Dr
Ghassany is now requesting the University that medical ethics is accepted as a mandatory course for the medical programme. He emphasized at the end of presentation the needs to work with policy makers to make them realize the link between ethics and research.

**Question-and-answer**

**Q:** How many hours does the course consist of? How do you evaluate the course?

**A:** Five days. At the end of the course, we receive feedback from students.

**Q:** What is the reaction of students to the issue of female circumcision? What do you teach about cancer patients?

**A:** The issue of female circumcision is a sensitive subject and needs to be carefully considered when introduced. We do not discuss it in the beginning of the course but once students are in the programmes, we can introduce it with a careful consideration of Islamic teaching on this issue. With regard to other gender issues, we teach only female students.

**Q:** The Arabic language is not less suitable for ethical issues. Medicine and ethics should be taught in their mother tongue.

**A:** It is desirable that the teaching of ethics will take place in Arabic. We have to consider what materials and which concepts are used. We need to train teachers as well since the Arabic language has not been exposed so much to medical ethics and bioethics.

**Ethics Teaching in Jordan**

**Dr Rand Jraisat** of the Arab Thought Forum presented her proposal to establish bioethics courses in Jordan. According to Dr Jraisat, there is neither a systematic bioethics course nor bioethicists in Jordan. It is regrettable that Jordan has not yet paid attention to bioethics teaching despite increasing worldwide activities in this field. The major objective of bioethics education is to promote critical thinking skills and ethical maturity. Students are expected to be sensitive to moral obligation and responsibility. Scientific literacy is important in bioethics education.

Dr Jraisat argues that ethics education should start at high school, then needs to be continued at college and university level. In bioethics courses, different theories of ethics and philosophical background need to be introduced. Legal problems, global bioethics and human rights issues should also be included in the course. Then concrete issues in bioethics, especially management of medical information should be taught. The important issues are truth telling, end of life, eugenics, human genetics, environmental ethics, bioinformatics, GMOs, resource allocation, public health issues and so on. The topics could be modified based on the students’ level and their fields of study. Bioethics should be included in all undergraduate programmes as a mandatory subject. The teaching language should be English for science students and Arabic for humanities students. Credit hours could be two or three hours.

**Dr Ibrahim Ramahi** of the National Institute of Forensic Pathology & Medicine emphasized that the basic foundation of ethics should be sought in religion. Ethics teaching starts at the very early stage of development of children first at home then it continues at primary, secondary and high schools. Religious knowledge is equal to the knowledge of ethics. Then at medical colleges, bioethics courses are taught to medical students, nursing students and pharmaceutical students.
However, Dr Ramahi pointed out that the weight given to bioethics in medical school is much less than it should be. For example, in Master programmes in nursing, only 7 pages out of 553 pages of the nursing research book are cited for bioethics. In Master programmes in science and technology, ethics of research is taught during 48 hours (equal to three credit hours). Dr Ramahi pointed out the lack of teaching bioethics in Jordan. Except for a proposal from one of the private schools to administer teaching ethics as a subject in schools, there is no definite plan to set up teaching ethics.

Nevertheless, Jordan has been exposed to bioethical concern in research involving human subjects due to an increase of medical tourism. It is for that reason that Jordan has adopted a clinical trial law based on the Declaration of Helsinki. This law underlines all important issues in conducting research on human subjects. Informed consent of the research participants should be obtained in their mother tongue.

Dr Abualraghib of the University of Jordan talked about bioethics teaching for students of forensic medicine. He is the first person who has started teaching forensic medicine including medical ethics in Jordan and he was the only person to teach until 1986. Since 1977, he teaches medical ethics to students of law, nursing and medicine. His medical ethics course consists of 35 lectures, seminars and video materials which gives one hour credit. This course is introduced at the fourth year of medical education. In the course, definition of medical ethics, legal aspects of medicine, public health act, confidentiality, caring for dying patients, research on human beings and animals, international code of medical ethics and other important principles are taught. With regard to specific issues, ethics of IVF, sterilisation, abortion, physician-assisted suicide, cloning and other topics are included in the lecture series. At the end of the course, students are evaluated for their work but professors are also evaluated by students.

Question-and-answer

Q: How many students are there in the class?

A: Students are divided in groups of 7 to 9. We have five qualified faculty members to teach the course.

Q: How many medical faculties are there in Jordan and how many of them teach medical ethics?

A: There are four public medical schools. I know only the teaching program of the University of Jordan.

Q: How many teaching hours?

A: 16 hours at the fourth year and two days course at the fifth year which makes a total of 40 hours.

Q: Ethics in religion and ethics in medicine are not identical. We cannot justify medical ethics by religious teaching.

A (Dr Abualraghi): Ethical issues cannot be differentiated from religion. For example, the issue of cloning raises the question of what is the identity of a human being. We have the reference in religion and these values in society are reflected in the law.

A (Dr Jraisat): Religion is important but we need a new system of teaching ethics. For example we have a carefully elaborated law but it is not well known. We need to promote more awareness of bioethics.
A (Dr Ramahi): In our country, religious teaching is closely related to ethics of medicine.

Ethics teaching in Saudi Arabia

After a break, six presentations were given by experts from Saudi Arabia.

Dr Abdulaziz M. Alswailem, Director of the National Resources and Environment Research Institute (NRERI) and Chairperson of the National Committee on Bioethics, presented the ethics committees in Saudi Arabia. There are several national committees related to bioethics including the national committee for science and environment, the committee for health and the Committee on Bioethics. They try to combine their culture and ethics in the framework of Islamic Sharia to regulate ethical issues of daily practice.

Members of the National Bioethics Committee include a number of governmental authorities, representatives of hospitals, universities and institutes. The committee reviews regularly the system of research, assesses and controls laboratories’ work. The Bioethics Committee was established more than five years ago and elaborated many regulations. There are several subcommittees established under the Bioethics committee, one is working on research involving human subjects, one is working on genetic issues and clinical research, another one is working in the field of animal research and plant research. Information and education are addressed by another subcommittee which is working on public communication. Ethical regulations established by the Bioethics Committee are legally binding and violation of the regulations is subject to punishment.

With regard to bioethics education, the Committee has a network of individuals and students who are informed of the Committee’s work and they can submit their opinions to the Committee. Furthermore, online training is made available and those who wish to conduct research on human subjects and on animals have to complete the training with more than 75% of correct answers. There is also a system of electronic voting to receive public opinions. The Committee organises group discussions and receives feedback from researchers on stem cell research, genetic research, and clinical trials.

Dr Mohammed Al-Jumah, Director of the Medical & Health Sciences Research Center at King Saud Bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences gave a presentation on bioethics courses at his University. The programme of health sciences research at the University started about one and half year ago. The mission of the center is to guarantee excellence of health care which could be achieved through education and research. This is the largest training center in the region. The bioethics course is integrated in the medical school of the University at undergraduate level. Teaching of ethical principles and practices is integrated throughout medical education and occupies 12.5% of the curriculum. The ethics course is mandatory and provides two credit hours for the first semester. The objectives of the course are that students demonstrate an attitude of respect for patients and that they understand ethical principles such as the concept of confidentiality and Islamic medical ethics. The course teaches also the history of medicine, Koran and particular issues such as abortion, prenatal screening, genetic testing, human reproduction, fair distribution of health care resources, dying patients and so on.

At the college of nursing, ethics education is also included as a mandatory course. In the course, accountability, code of conduct for professionals, ethical principles, legal aspects of nursing practice, informed consent, and other ethical dilemmas are taught. The course consists of lectures, discussion and case analysis.
For postgraduate residency training, there is a two-day course of lectures, seminars and clinical case discussions. In the school of public health, there is an optional one-week course as a part of the master program of public health. The teaching language is English.

Dr Ibrahim Albdulkareem of King Abdulaziz Medical City at Riyadh then briefly talked about a post bachelor degree course in biology and chemistry. The course is given at the medical center and it teaches issues related to molecular biology and research settings in the laboratories.

Dr Muhammad Zuheir Al-Kawi of King Feisal Specialist Hospital & Research center talked about ethics teaching activities of the center. The center started as a cancer treatment center then became a center for biological research. The research conducted at the center involves human subjects and many efforts have been made to establish regulations in regard to animal research, tissue banking, and genetic research. The center organizes a seminar twice a year which teaches 40 to 50 participants how to conduct research, how to test hypotheses, how to carry out statistic analysis and how to consider ethical issues. Anybody can participate in the seminar but the majority of the participants are postgraduate physicians and nurses. At the end of the seminar, a certificate of the completion of the course will be given to the participants.

Dr Jamal Saleh Jarallah of the College of Medicine, King Saud University gave his presentation on medical ethics teaching at the King Saud University. Medical ethics has been introduced more than 20 years ago and some changes in the course were introduced four years ago. It used to be taught during the second year of medical education but now it is taught during the fourth year and the credit hours have increased from one to two. The major objective of the course is to define ethics from Islamic perspective and to implement the theory into practice through Islamic Sharia.

In Saudi Arabia, there are several guidelines in the field of medical ethics and they are introduced to the students in the course. The main topics of the course include the important principles such as informed consent, confidentiality and specific issues of human procreation, IVF, human genome research, cloning, sterilisation and others. There are about 100 female students and 200 male students. The method of teaching is interactive lectures and students are evaluated by the traditional examination. In order to promote interactive lectures, students are divided into small groups of about 10 and they can select a topic of their interest, however it is not easy to do so. The problem in the course, Dr Jarallah explained, is the lack of reading materials and references. He also feels that evaluation of the students should be carried out during the course not only at the end of the course so that it would motivate students to improve their learning during the course.

Dr Farad Kalefah Alwahhabi of King Saud University gave a presentation on ethics teaching in psychiatry. He spent six years in Canada and the major difference he observed in this field between Canada and his country was that participation in research was very active in Canada. He analysed the situation in Saudi Arabia and tried to adopt the system of Canada in order to promote participation of patients in research in Saudi Arabia. The most significant change brought after several years was in respect to the attitudes of physicians towards patients. Physicians started to deal with patients with more respect and became more aware of ethical issues.

The efforts made to teach practical situations were targeting on the next generation of medical professionals. For that purpose, the course was first introduced at the undergraduate level and later it will be introduced in the subsequent levels as well. The course is appreciated by students as it is shown in the fact that more than 90 % of students expressed their satisfaction after completing the course. Dr.Alwahhabi pointed out that the problems confronting this course are lack of references to be used and also lack of teaching staff. In order to continue the course, producing qualified teachers should be supported.
Question-and-answer

Q: What are the problems of implementing the courses and to continue them?

A: One of the problems is the lack of materials. We have also a problem with special subjects in the course, for example very little time is given to international views.

Q: Do you have a plan to establish a separate department of medical ethics and law?

A: We have an intention of doing that but we are confronted with obstacles. We tried to establish a medical ethics unit in the forensic medicine department but it was not realized due to lack of resources and personnel.

Several questions were raised concerning specific issues such as abortion, preservation of zygotes produced in the course of IVF treatment and stem cell banks. Some interesting information on the situation in the region was provided, for example in Saudi Arabia zygotes cannot be stored according to Islamic Sharia, abortion is regulated by law in Jordan, and a meeting on abortion was held in Cairo in 2006. Nevertheless, it was confirmed by the participants that discussing specific issues and regulations was not the objective of the meeting. Exchange of information on specific issues could be made in another occasion in future.

2\textsuperscript{nd} Day (Thursday 28 November 2006)

Ethics teaching in Egypt

The second day of the meeting started with the presentation by Dr Gamal I. Serour, director of the Egyptian IVF & ET Center at Al Azhar University in Egypt. Dr Serour started his presentation first by introducing the activities of the University in this field. The University has been actively carrying out activities at the international level collaborating with various organizations. The International Islamic Center for Population Studies and Research was founded at the University in cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund. The center conducts research in the Islamic world, organizes conferences and workshops on human rights, motherhood and the population problems in the Islamic world.

Then Dr Serour proceeded to introduce his experience of the international cooperation in the region. Dr Serour decided to organize an international conference after observing negligence of ethical considerations by researchers conducting research involving human subjects. In December 1991, a bioethics conference in human reproduction research in the Islamic world was held. The conference was attended by experts from different disciplines of 50 countries. First, the participants doubted if they could reach any agreement on concrete issues. To their surprise, they could come up with guidelines, which were published in the conference’s proceedings in English and Arabic in 1992. His center also hosted two meetings of the FIGO committee on ethical aspects of human reproduction and women’s health in 1991 and 2000.

In Egypt, a national bioethics committee was established in 1996 under the National Commission for UNESCO by the Ministry of Higher Education. The committee is headed by the former minister of health and have many high level representatives as its members. Currently, there are eight bioethics committees in Egypt established by Ministries, National Institutes, National research centers and universities.
Then Dr Serour discussed his experience with introducing bioethics teaching in the University. The center prepared a curriculum and proposed it to the dean and the council of Al Azhar College of Medicine in order to include the curriculum in medical education. But after a long negotiation, the proposal was rejected on the basis that they have already too much requirements in the program and that there will not be sufficient staff to teach bioethics. However, after continuous approaches to the Faculty of Medicine, it was finally approved to be included in the program as from 2000.

The bioethics curriculum at Al Azhar University teaches basic principles such as human rights and medicine, professional codes of conducts as well as various specific issues including genetic technology, abortion, sterilisation, organ donation, human cloning, care for the dying, euthanasia, medical research and ethics, pharmaceutical issues, health administration and health economics. Various methodologies have been applied in the course, e.g. problem solving methods, investigative methods, brainstorming, role playing, case studies, discussion and group preparation of essays. The course is taught to postgraduate students and the duration of the course is two weeks.

The course is mandatory for the center’s staff members who wish to conduct research. Not only students, but senior researchers can also attend the course and they are encouraged to do so. Dr Serour concluded his presentation by making remarks on the tasks to be done in this field in Egypt. There is a need to standardize the work of existing bioethics committees and committees should be established in each research institute. Assistance of international organizations such as UNESCO, WHO, UNFPA and FIGO is desperately needed in this field.

Question-and-answer

Q: How did you introduce ethics to researchers who were unaware of ethical considerations?

A: The way to tell them is important. It is not effective just pointing out their weakness but we need to provide the solution as well. We need to introduce to them existing standards and make them compare the different ways of conducting research.

A participant commended Dr Serour’s effort to introduce bioethics course in Egypt as a well-known success story. He commented that thanks to his effort, since 2006 a plan of introducing a three-day course of bioethics into all Universities in Egypt started and more than 16 Universities have agreed on that.

Teaching ethics in Qatar

The meeting then continued with the presentation of Dr Khalid A. Alali of the University of Qatar. He spoke about the bioethics course at the Biological Science Department of the University of Qatar. The course identifies and explores the ethical dimensions of science and technology. Issues like ethics in biotechnology, reproductive technology, genetics, species conservation, use of natural resources, research with human and non-human subjects are addressed in the course. The course consists of three hours lecture and discussion. The number of the students is 20 to 25. The course is targeting students who have completed two or more semesters of the undergraduate program in biological science and biomedicine. Objectives of the course are to identify the moral issues in biology and analyse them, to learn professional standards on decision-making by balancing different values and priorities, and to become capable of dealing with dilemmas in professional life.

The course is designed in such a way that students are first introduced to the nature of ethics then gradually to their professional and specific domains. Active participation of students in the
discussion is encouraged in the course. Students can take initiatives to invite speakers in the classroom and they can propose to use various materials and methods. The teaching language is English but during the discussion, students can speak Arabic as well. The weight of the final examination is 10% and other contributions to the final assessment will be provided during the course. Students are required to submit written papers on selected topics. They also receive reading assignments from local journals, document from the university library and independent learning centers.

Dr Alali expressed his concern about the motivation of students to attend the course. The majority of students chose this course because of recommendations of their professors or for obtaining credits, not because they were interested in the topic. Although they appreciate the course in the end, the major deficiency Dr Alali observed was the lack of critical thinking and personal opinion on ethical issues. For those weak students, providing group works could be a solution. He also pointed out the problem of religious background for some students to think critically on ethical issues. When the religion has taken a position on certain issues, they think that there is no need for further discussion and reflection.

With regard to the timing of introducing the course, Dr Alali thinks that it could be integrated into the basic education. However, ethics involved in specialized fields would be better introduced at higher education level. It should be mandatory for life science students and optional for other students. He also expressed the need to train young staff, to establish teacher-training courses, to develop course evaluation criteria other than traditional methods and to promote further interdisciplinarity by involving staff from different specialities. He concluded his presentation by suggesting UNESCO or other international agencies to seek a way to provide accreditation for having a mandatory course of bioethics at the University level.

Dr Bahaa Alsayed Darwish of the University of Qatar reflected on his experiences as a philosopher with ethics teaching. The objective of teaching ethics is to develop critical attitudes, identify ethical issues, to be able to pass judgement on various issues in an ethical way and to become more tolerant of different opinions. In order to achieve these goals, students need to be introduced first to different ethical theories such as normative ethics, descriptive ethics, consequentialism, utilitarianism, virtue ethics and so on. Then, the importance of applied ethics and bioethics could be taught. Specific issues including abortion, IVF, assisted reproduction, embryo donation, euthanasia, gene therapy, human cloning and GMOs could be presented from the viewpoints of its pros and cons.

The course should combine lecture and discussion. Dr Darwish thinks that presenting religious positions on the issues is important however religion should be incorporated into the issues and not be used to end the discussion on ethical problems. Students should become capable of discussing issues scientifically, philosophically, critically integrating religious perspectives and to behave ethically.

Question-and-answer

Q: Science and philosophy are opposite disciplines, one is about the facts we know, the other is about what we do not know. How can you balance these two disciplines in the evaluation of the course?

A (Dr Alali): It is a difficult to have clear criteria of evaluation. I sit down with students and explain how they are graded and provide them with the reasons of evaluation. We introduce student peer review methods and ask students to evaluate other students during the discussion.
A (Dr Darwish): I had the same question in my mind especially with regard to religion. If students came up with a position which is against religion, how can we evaluate them? But it did not happen that way. Ethical training deepened their beliefs.

Q: Do you have enough time to develop and evaluate critical thinking of students especially when there are too many students?

A (Dr Alali): We have maximally 25 to 30 students; we can divide them into two groups if we have enough staff. We have a three-day course and have enough time for discussion.

A comment was made from a participant that religious leaders are not against ethical teaching but could provide great support if they are well informed. Dr Darwish agreed with it. Ethical debate is a continuous process along the development of science and religious leaders are also open to discussion taking into consideration the future progress of science like in the case of germ-line gene therapy.

Teaching ethics in Kuwait

Then the meeting proceeded with the presentation of Dr Manal M. Bouhaimed of the University of Kuwait. She is an ophthalmologist and introduced a course of professional ethics in the University of Kuwait in 1996 at PhD level. She was confronted with many difficulties introducing this course. Many persons were afraid of the conflicts with Sharia and of overloading the requirements of the PhD program. She thinks that accreditation from an international organization could be very helpful to introduce the course. Once it is introduced in one university, it would be easier to introduce it to other universities.

A new curriculum of ethics teaching was developed in collaboration with Sydney University. The first phase of this course started in September 2005. The university has also recognized the need for integration of courses into the program. But the students were afraid of receiving bad marks from ethical courses since they do not have a philosophical background.

In the new curriculum, professional ethics are taught to the students of the first and the second year of the PhD programme. Then, at the second phase of the course, students learn case studies like how to address patients’ wishes to take unproven therapy or how to deal with mistakes of medical professionals. Dr Bouhaimed then presented the training of students through a dry laboratory and a wet laboratory. This training allows students to practice surgical experiences without actually involving patients; such practice is at the same time ethical and effective.

Question-and-answer

Q: The Islamic Organization for Medical Sciences has a publication “Islamic Bioethics”. How is it recognized in your region?

A: In Kuwait, it is recognized as a governmental document. There is no direct impact of the book in academic programmes in Kuwait.

Q: What are the impacts of introducing bioethical principles?

A: Now we have inspired students. They can be very active in organizing events, inviting speakers, and editing teaching materials.
Teaching ethics in United Arab Emirates

The last speaker of the meeting was Dr Lana Ali Badreddine of the Ministry of Health of the United Arab Emirates. According to Dr Badreddine, professional ethics is taught at different levels but not as a specific curriculum. There are more than 30 Universities in the United Arab Emirates and they have their own curricula. It is difficult to introduce bioethics courses in the universities because their priorities are in other fields like economics. Recently, two universities have recently been established and this will provide a good occasion to introduce ethics courses, especially in the American university.

Dr Badreddine thinks that all students regardless of their specialities need to receive ethics education. She pointed out the problem of just having a plan to teach ethics because there often is no compatibility between plan and practice. In order to establish an environment to introduce ethics courses, she thinks that the credibility of the professionals’ work and the awareness raising in the society are important factors. In order to involve the general public in discussions on bioethical issues like human cloning and IVF, the society needs to be sensitised to bioethics. Establishment of ethics education needs to be supported in the society. Ethics education should be embedded in the culture. She also thinks that the country should support the establishment of ethics courses in all universities.

Question-and-answer

Q: Are there ethical committees?

A: There is a plan to establish a committee since 2003 but it has not yet been established. Even if a committee is established, it cannot be the solution to ethics education.

Conclusion and follow-up

The last session of the two-day meeting was dedicated to discussion of suggestions for the follow-up of the meeting and for desirable activities in the region.

Dr Henk ten Have first mentioned that UNESCO can currently undertake the following actions.

1. UNESCO will send the standardised forms to obtain information about ethics experts and centers, institutions and committees to all participants of the meeting. The information will be validated and then inputted into the UNESCO databases, publicly accessible in the Global Ethics Observatory
2. UNESCO will also forward the standardised forms to describe ethics teaching programmes to all experts who have an actual teaching program, in order to obtain up to date information regarding existing teaching activities.
3. The report of the meeting will be produced and will be made available through the website of UNESCO. Prior to that, a draft report will be circulated to the participants.
4. UNESCO, with the help of experts in the meeting, will continue to identify more ethics experts from the countries in the region and from different disciplines in order to invite them to future meetings.
5. UNESCO will create a regional network of experts of ethics teaching.

6. UNESCO will inform the experts in the network of updated information and will invites feedback, suggestions and recommendations from the experts.

7. With regard to networking and coordinating, the UNESCO Office in Cairo will be a focal point of exchange of information and coordination. The establishment of a documentation center of bioethics in the region is foreseen as well. It would be also helpful if a journal for ethics teaching can be established in this region.

Many other suggestions have then be provided by the participants in the following discussion and reflection upon the state of affairs in ethics teaching.

8. UNESCO could seek a way to provide accreditation of bioethics teaching. One way to proceed is to approach accreditation bodies and promote the inclusion of bioethics teaching in medical curricula.

9. A practical suggestion in this regard was made. The Scientific Association of Deans of Arab Medical Schools (Division of the Association of Arab Universities) will have its next meeting in the first week of May 2007. They will discuss criteria for accreditation of medical schools in conjunction with the WHO. The suggestion is send a message to the General Secretary of the Arab Dean Association) and convey the recommendation to consider inclusion of medical ethics and bioethics in the curriculum of medical schools as a condition or prerequisite for accreditation of any medical school in the Arab world.

10. Regional cooperation and networking should be promoted. UNESCO can serve as a focal point of such a network (through the Cairo Office). The purpose of this network is first of all sharing of experiences.

11. We need to seek a strategy for approaching policy makers. Several years ago, UNESCO has organized a round table of ministers of science on the topic of bioethics. It was a high level meeting attended by more than 140 ministries of science and they committed to work in this field. We need to organize a meeting like that again, but then specifically focused on ethics teaching.

12. Better exchange of information about teaching programmes and materials is necessary. Identifying teaching programs and inputting these into the Global Ethics Observatory will help to disseminate experiences in ethics teaching.

13. One specific objective could be to develop a basic book that covers teaching ethics experiences and programmes in this region and that is especially focussed on the needs and problems of the region. Such a book should be developed in a process of consensus building.

14. UNESCO can provide assistance in developing the competency in ethics teaching through offering a basic course in ethics. The current activities of the Advisory Committee on the Teaching of Ethics aiming at developing a core course in bioethics can be helpful. The proposal for the core course will be finalised early 2007. It can then be tested in several pilot programs in the Arab region.
15. UNESCO can provide assistance in better educating ethics teachers by making the recently developed Ethics Teacher Training Course available in the Arab region.

16. UNESCO can support implementation of ethics teaching through increasing awareness of its importance by organizing conferences and meetings.

17. UNESCO can provide human resources from among IBC and COMEST members and other experts in contact with UNESCO who could assist in implementing bioethics education.

18. Cooperation with ALECSO in this field should be established. Recommendations of this meeting could be included in the education plan of ALECSO.

19. UNESCO should collaborate intensively with EMRO in promoting ethics teaching.

20. We need to plan that this kind of meeting to be organized regularly once a year or every two years. One speaker from each country should be identified and we need to invite more countries in this region.

21. Suggestions of names of experts could be sent to UNESCO.